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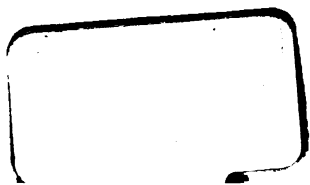
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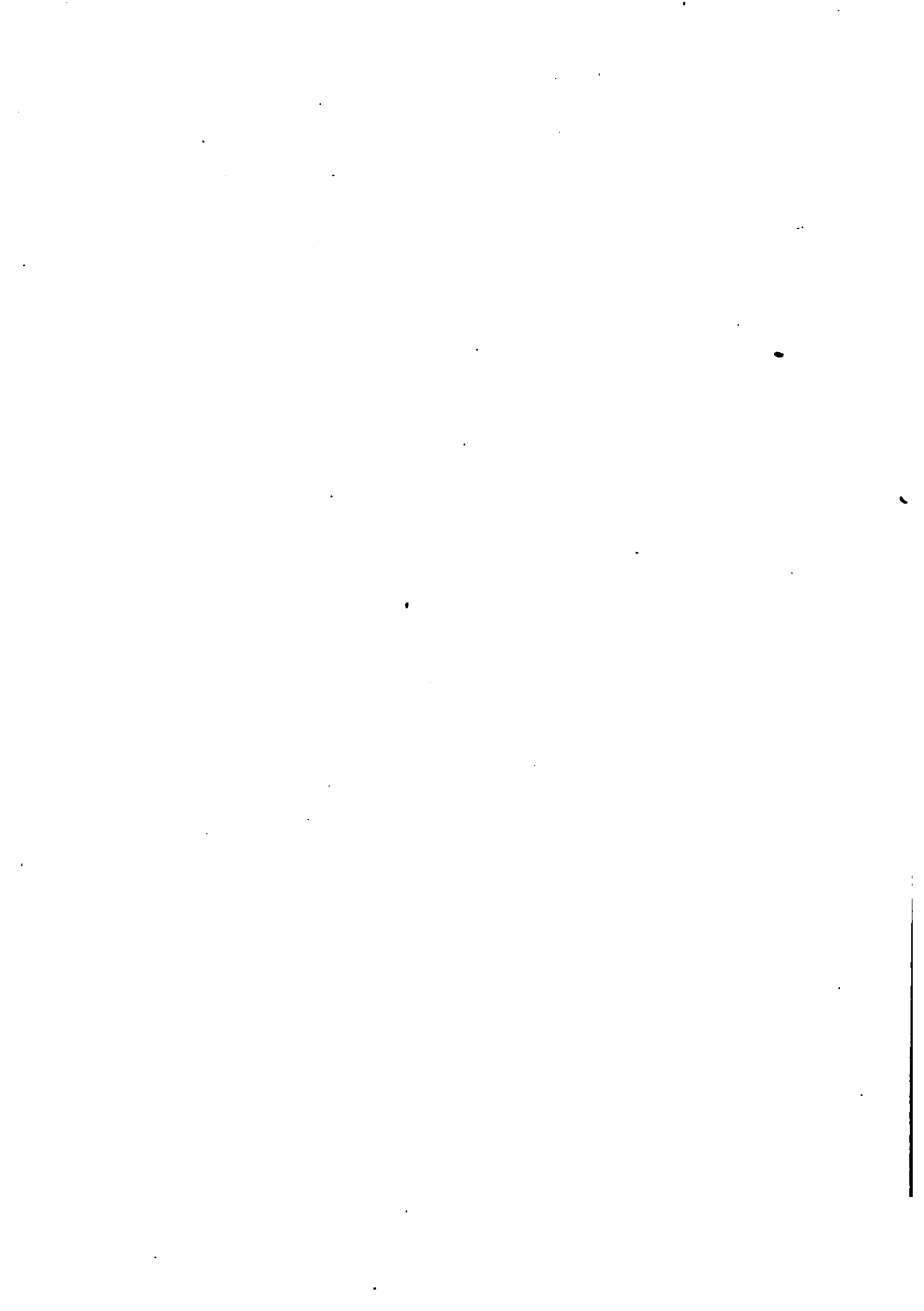
MAGGIE'S MISTAKE



ILLUSTRATED BY
L. FROLICH.









It made me feel quite grown up to have a trunk of my own.

MAGGIE'S MISTAKE:

A SCHOOLGIRL'S STORY.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "AUNT ANNIE'S STORIES," ETC.

WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS BY

L. FRÖLICH.

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MAGGIE'S MISTAKE.

CHAPTER I.

MY HOME.

I AM afraid it's true: Nelly says so, and though I don't always think she's right, I'm very, very much afraid she is this time. She says we've all made a great mistake, she and I, and all the girls at school; and the worst of it is, that though she doesn't say so—of course she thinks it wouldn't be polite—yet she must know that I have been the worst of all. I wish she'd say so right out: if she's my friend I think she should, and then I'd say, "Yes, Nelly, I know I've been wrong all my life;" it's a dreadful thing to say, and most likely she'd despise me all the rest of her days; but

I can't help it, it seems the only way to get right again.

I've been wondering ever since I've been ill how I came to go on in this way. Nelly's mamma told her that little girls ought to believe that grown-up people always know best, and that if we had had more faith in our governesses and friends we should never have got into all this trouble; but then, as Nelly said, we are neither of us quite little girls, we are both more than ten, and I at least am tall for my age.

Nelly thinks I was not properly brought up: let me see, how was I brought up? 'One odd thing is, I never belonged to a papa and mamma, as most children do; that always seemed strange to me, and I think it would have been nicer than belonging to Uncle Fred and Aunt Sophia. I wonder how I came to belong to them. I wish people could choose who they'd belong to. I know I would have chosen some other uncle and

aunt ; and I fancy, if she'd had her own way, Aunt Sophia wouldn't have chosen to have me. I suppose I came to her like a cold : she couldn't help it.

And now I remember something she said once—oh, it seems so long ago, I'd forgotten it quite till this moment. I was sitting on the old velvet hassock in front of the fire : something very disagreeable had happened, but I haven't the least idea what it was ; I think I must have been very small indeed. Well, Uncle Fred said in his queer way, "Sophia, I don't believe you'll be able to manage that child a bit ;" and Aunt Sophia snapped at him just as she always does, "Children are all alike, and I've managed lots of them before now ; she's no different from other children, I suppose."

I remember feeling very hot and uncomfortable, and I do believe I've never liked Aunt Sophia since that time. I wonder whether I liked her before : I can't recollect : I'm

afraid I've a very bad memory, for I must have belonged to her a long time before that, and yet that seems the first thing I remember about her.

Was it very long after that day, I wonder, when I first knew Nelly? We often say we've been friends all our lives, but that can't be quite true, because I remember the first time I saw her. Her mamma brought her to see Aunt Sophia, and we played together in the hall. Nelly told me all about her life, as far back as her christening, when she wore a crimson cloak, and she asked me what I wore, but I couldn't remember, so I said I didn't care much about clothes, which Nelly said was very funny.

Then Nelly asked me about Uncle and Aunt, whether I liked them, and I said "No," at which she looked so surprised that I said I didn't mind Uncle, but I couldn't bear Aunt Sophia. So she wanted to know why, and then I told her what

Aunt had said about my being just like all other children.

“It isn’t true, you know,” I said, “for some children are clean and some are dirty, some are ugly and some pretty, and some are black and some are white.”

“Yes, and some are clever and some are stupid,” my little friend said. “What a funny person your aunt must be not to know all that. My mamma is so different. I heard her tell somebody the other day that I was not at all an ordinary child; but I suppose your aunt would say you were.”

“I don’t know what ordinary means,” I replied, rather vexed; “but I do know one thing very well, and I wish Aunt Sophia knew it too.”

“What is that?” inquired Nelly very eagerly. I suppose she guessed from my face that what I had to say was very important, for she looked quite anxious for my answer.

“Why, that Uncle was quite right when

he said Aunt didn't know how to manage me."

"But doesn't she?" said Nelly, looking quite amazed; "I thought grown-up people always knew how to manage children: I mean, know what they should eat and drink, and when they must take powders; that's what you mean, don't you, Maggie?"

"Oh no, that's not it at all," I exclaimed quite impatiently; "I'm afraid you'll never understand; it's about sitting upright, and walking properly, and hemming, and learning my lessons. Now, Aunt's always making mistakes; she's always telling me to go on with my work just when I've done looking out of window, and mean to go on with my work: what's the use in that? And then she scolds me for not learning my hymn just when I'm saying it over to myself, and should have known it if she hadn't interrupted me. Oh, she's so worrying; and the fact is, she doesn't know how to manage me."

“But she can’t know all that,” suggested Nelly timidly.

“No, that’s just it; she’s always making mistakes. Now, only yesterday she was as cross as she could be about my lessons. She wouldn’t help me with my sum, which was dreadfully difficult, and of course I couldn’t do it by myself; so I didn’t see any good in trying. I thought if I waited a long time, she would get tired of staying in doors and want to go out, and then of course she’d help me. But she was much too cross. She actually went out by herself, and left me at home sitting there in the dining-room with the stupid sum in front of me. I thought perhaps she’d get over her temper before she came back; but she was worse, Nelly, much worse. And she made me stay in my room and have nothing but bread and potatoes for dinner, and I don’t believe she’d have let me have any tea at all if I had not done my sum in the afternoon.”

"Then you did do it, though it was so hard?" Nelly inquired.

"Yes, I thought of a way to do it, because, you see, it wasn't worth while to go without tea just for the sake of a sum."

That's all I remember of our talk, and when Nelly went away I felt very miserable, because I thought I should never see her again all my life. It was very funny that we should happen to go to the same school. I've often wondered whether that afternoon Nelly's mamma put it into Aunt Sophia's head to send me. Of course she told her how she disliked me, just as I'd told Nelly that I could not bear her. I shouldn't wonder if they talked about it then; but I didn't hear about it till some time afterwards—I don't know how long. Oh, it was good news to me. I can't tell you what a horrid day it had been. I'd been in one scrape after another, and Aunt Sophia had been scolding all day. First, in the morning, I was late for breakfast, which wasn't

my fault, I'm sure : how could I help being sleepy, and going to sleep again after I was called ? Then I made faces at the cat at prayer-time, which didn't hurt anybody, I'm sure ; and I ran out into the garden without my hat, and got two new freckles on my nose ; and then I found a frog, which was so funny that it put all my lessons out of my head, and when Aunt called me I hadn't even got my books out ; but then I couldn't help seeing the frog, it was in the middle of the path. If children are to be good, and proper, and tidy, and punctual, I used to say to myself, they should be born blind, and deaf and dumb ; but I suppose that's a mistake too. I forget about the lessons, except that Aunt did nothing but scold, and I did nothing but cry, and then I had my dinner in the schoolroom—only a nasty bit of cold fat mutton, and I knew quite well there were ducks and green peas in the dining-room. I was very miserable : not about the ducks—it wasn't that ; nor about my les-

sons—I didn't care if I never learnt French or music in my life ; and it wasn't about Aunt being angry—I didn't mind that much ; but I was very unhappy, and I'd cried so much that I felt quite sick. But in the afternoon I played with my doll, and that made me feel better, and by tea-time I had almost forgotten all about Aunt, and the verb " to have," and the ducks ; and when the tea-bell rang I ran down stairs just as usual, and as there was nobody in the dining-room, Puss and I had a splendid game with a ball of red wool that I found in Aunt's work-basket. I don't think Aunt had forgotten about the verb " to have," for her face was just as solemn as in the morning ; but she said nothing, only looked very hard at me two or three times, and gave great sighs. I thought she was sorry she hadn't sent me up any duck, and was thinking she would let me have some for tea, but she didn't say anything about it : perhaps she wanted to keep it for Uncle's breakfast.

Well, it was that evening I heard about going to school. It was Uncle Fred told me. He asked me if I should like to go to the same school as little Nelly Sandford; and I was so delighted that I couldn't help jumping on to his knee and kissing him, which seemed to surprise him very much; for he said: "How now, little girl! I didn't think you were so fond of lessons that you would think it such a fine thing to be at them all day long."

And then Aunt Sophia said: "Maggie thinks it will be all play, I'll answer for it; but she'll find herself very much mistaken, I hope: though she doesn't mind how she disgraces herself and us, I at least don't wish to see her a perfect dunce."

"It was Nelly and the other children, Aunt," I said, feeling rather uncomfortable, for I didn't care that Uncle should hear about all my misdemeanours.

"Yes, of course, Sophia," he said; "you

need not be hurt; it is the thought of play-fellows that pleases the child so much. Well, Maggie, I am glad you like the idea, and I hope you'll work hard, and turn out a genius yet."

What that meant I hadn't the least idea, and I was so happy I didn't think of asking, but I have often wondered since; it seems to me that sometimes it means a boy, because Uncle used to say of the boy who helped to wait at table, "he has a genius for making mistakes;" and then Mrs. Lowther told Nelly once that she had a genius for saying wrong things. I wonder which kind of genius Uncle wanted me to be: I suppose I'm more likely to be like Nelly, because I'm a girl.

But I was forgetting about going to school, and all the fuss there was about it. That's only just a year ago, so I can remember all about it, and what a number of new frocks I had. I wondered very much why my old frocks would not do. Some of them were short,

because I'd been growing. Aunt said that was one of the most tiresome things about children, they were always growing; but she didn't say it was my fault, as she did about most things. My new frocks were made long, so that it might be some time before they went up above my knees, and my best frock of all had two tucks in it and a great piece turned down at the top, so that, as Davies, my aunt's maid, said, I couldn't very well outgrow that; and it would serve me till I was married and wanted more things.

She wouldn't tell me why I should want new things when I was married, so I suppose it's because Mr. Maggie, as I always call him to myself when I think about my husband, may be cross, and not like me to have new frocks when he has to pay for them. That will be very awkward; I think before I get married I'll learn how to mend my frocks. Well, besides my frocks, I had a new jacket and two new hats, and instead of pinafores I

had some aprons; and then Aunt Sophia bought a big box to hold all my clothes. It made me feel quite grown-up to have a trunk of my own, and I remember quite well now that when it was carried into Mrs. Comfort's house, I saw a little girl watching, and she ran away to tell the others, looking quite astonished. I dare say her box was only an old one of her mamma's, and not a nice new one like mine. But as I am writing a history of my life, at least of all that I can remember about it, I must not leave out all about the day when I went to Mrs. Comfort's school. And I must try and tell it properly too, and not begin at the wrong end, which would be like putting on my shoes before my stockings, or my hat before my frock.

Well, when I got up in the morning, Davies was in my room to see that I dressed tidily, and washed myself very particularly well indeed. And she talked so solemnly, just like a sermon, and I do believe tried to

make me feel unhappy, and wish that I wasn't going.

"At any rate, Miss, you should remember your aunt, and all the pains she's taken with you, and try and look as if you'd a little heart, even though, may be, you haven't," she said rather angrily, when she saw how pleased I was, and how she couldn't bring anything like tears into my eyes.

"That would be just like telling a story," I said, "if I'm not sorry, I shan't pretend to be."

"'Shan't!'" said Davies with a sigh. "When you come back from school we shan't hear that word quite so often, I hope; Mrs. Comfort will make you learn another word, I expect, Miss Maggie."

"What word, I wonder?" I asked. Davies made no reply; she never liked me, I know, and I do think that on that morning she quite disliked me, she was so angry that I didn't cry when I said good-bye to her and Aunt.

She didn't know how very nearly I did, though, nor how much I should have liked to have said, "Aunt Sophia, I'm sorry I've been so naughty and troublesome," only I thought that Aunt Sophia wouldn't believe me. No, she didn't know it, and so I dare say she's gone on thinking me the most unfeelingest, disagreeablest child that ever was. I'd better have done it, for it was true at that minute I did feel sorry.

It was Uncle Fred that took me to school, and when he left me he gave me a whole sovereign for pocket-money, which made Nelly Sandford think that for some things uncles were better than papas; papas only gave ten shillings, she told me. Nelly was very glad to see me; she told me the names of all the other children; there were not many older than I, because Mrs. Comfort did not generally take children whose parents lived near; most of the children's fathers and mothers lived a long way off, in India or New

Zealand. Nelly said Mrs. Comfort liked those children best; I can't think why: I don't think they were the nicest. Perhaps it was because they never went home for holidays, but always stayed with her; and yet if I had little children I think I should like them to go away sometimes. Mrs. Comfort was such a funny old lady—much, much older than my aunt or Nelly's mamma; we never could think how old she was, and she never would tell us: once Fanny French asked her if she could remember Queen Elizabeth, who lived a good while ago, I think, and she was quite angry, so we never liked to ask her since, though we were always wondering. She wore spectacles, but she always looked at us over the tops of them, which seemed very strange, and always made me laugh: I should have thought it would have been less trouble not to put them on. She did not teach us much, and very seldom came into the schoolroom; I suppose she was too old. When she did come, she always said

the same things: "My dears, when I was young, young ladies sat upright;" and if we were all looking at our book she would say, "Ah, that is the way to get on." It was very easy to please her, and we always said her name suited her very well; she never seemed uncomfortable herself, and she did not like other people to be so.

My uncle said good-bye to me as soon as ever he had seen me safely into the house, and then Mrs. Comfort sent for Nelly Sandford to take me upstairs to take my things off. Nelly came in great delight, and I felt quite at home directly I saw her, and when we were in the big bedroom alone we chattered away at a fine rate. But suddenly I stopped. "Nelly," I said, "ought not you to be doing your lessons, or is it a holiday?"

"Oh no, it is not a holiday, but my lessons don't signify much, for really I don't know what I've got to do."

"How very funny! does not Mrs. Com-

fort mark your lessons? Aunt Sophia always marked mine, so I could not say I didn't know what to do."

"I don't think Mrs. Comfort is much like your aunt," Nelly replied, "but she doesn't give us our lessons; it is Miss Careless who teaches us, and she is even more good-natured than Mrs. Comfort. Oh, it's great fun being at school, Maggie."

I thought it must be, and looking round the room, said that it did not look half so uncomfortable as Davies had said my bedroom would be; in fact, I thought my bed was prettier than the one at home.

"Yes, and it's such fun sleeping six in one room," Nelly replied; "you can't think what splendid games we have in the dark, when people think we are all asleep."

"And does anybody scold?" I inquired, very much surprised.

"Oh dear, no; Miss Careless only laughs if she happens to come in, and says we are silly

folks not to get as much sleep as we can ; but of course it can't signify to her whether we go to sleep or not."

"No, of course not," I said ; "but still it often seems to me, that though it can't signify to them one bit, grown-up people do trouble themselves a great deal about what children do."

"You are thinking about your aunt, Maggie, but never mind her ; there is nobody like her here."

"And is there really nobody who is always saying, 'Don't do this,' and 'Don't do that'—'Hold up your head,'—'Don't look behind you when you're out walking'—'Hold your pen properly,' and 'Don't let your wrist hang down when you are practising?' "

"No, really, Miss Careless never worries about such trumpery things as that, and the best of it is that she doesn't much mind if we don't know our lessons very perfectly ; she says she knows some people have bad

memories; she hasn't a very good one herself."

"I think I shall like her," I said; "but now tell me which is my bed; and where am I to put my things? Davies told me I was to be sure to put my things away tidily, or I should get into trouble."

"What nonsense! we always fling them down anywhere, and one of the maids comes and puts them away."

Put them away! why, though Davies had nothing to do but wait on Aunt Sophia and me, she never would put any of my walking things away. It certainly was very lazy of her: I always thought so.

CHAPTER II.

EASY TIMES.

NELLY was not far wrong when she said we had splendid games in bed at night ; it really was the greatest fun in all the world. We used to sit up in bed and fling the pillows at each other in the dark, and then sometimes, you know, when we grew very excited, we would send our shoes after them. It was a little awkward in the morning not to have the least idea where to look for your shoes, especially if you happened to get up rather late and be in a tremendous hurry ; and it was rather disagreeable to find that one of the pillows had upset the water-jug, and that the water had been running about the floor all night, wetting the carpet, and any of our

clothes that happened to be on the floor. But these were trifles, and did not prevent us from continuing our games — though once we were near getting in great trouble about it, as I will tell you in the proper place.

The first night of my school life, however, the great game with the pillows did not come off. It would not be safe, Nelly Sandford said, because sometimes Mrs. Comfort came up to see a new girl after she had gone to bed to see if she was home-sick or unhappy.

“And she wouldn’t like it?” I asked, rather surprised. If Miss Careless didn’t mind it, it seemed to be strange that the good-tempered, smiling old lady should see any harm in such proceedings.

“Well, she might not,” Nelly replied; and Kate Clowes was almost positive she would not. So we lay still and talked instead. Kate told us a long ghost-story, which was very amusing, and then they asked me if I didn’t know any to tell in return. It seemed very

stupid to be obliged to say no, but I really had never read any such stories, and so I could not think of anything that they would care to listen to after Kate's story.

And so by degrees we grew quite still, and all the rest fell fast asleep; but I felt too strange in my new bed to go to sleep as soon as usual. There seemed to be so many things to think about; so much had happened since the morning, that I could scarcely believe it was only one day since I had had that talk with Davies when she said I should learn to behave myself at school. Though it was really and truly such a short time, I could not help wondering to myself whether the schools that Davies knew were at all like Mrs. Comfort's. Nelly and Kate seemed to think one could do pretty much what one liked at school: that, I was sure, was not Davies's idea.

Well, I should see which was right, and in the meanwhile I was very glad that neither Mrs. Comfort nor Miss Careless were in the

very least like my Aunt Sophia. Nelly had told me that evening that she had often heard her mamma say that there were some children who could only be managed by kindness and gentleness, and she thought it was very likely I was one of those children. It seemed to me very probable, in fact quite plain, that this must be the case, for when Aunt had said to me, as she often did, "Now, Maggie, if that lesson is not learned by tea-time, you must have your tea by yourself in the school-room," I always used to think if she had only said, "Maggie, be quick and learn that, and you shall have some honey for your tea," why, I would have learned it at once. Yes, I am sure if Aunt had tried that plan she would have managed me as easily as possible.

This was what I was thinking about, that first night in bed ; and the next day I found that at all events Miss Careless did not try Aunt Sophia's plan at all.

A great bell rang very early in the morning, long before I wanted to get up, but it jumped into my head as soon as ever I woke that I was at school ; so I sat up in bed and rubbed my eyes very hard to try and wake myself. It was very difficult, for, you see, I had not gone to sleep so soon as usual, and so I really was very tired.

"Nelly," I said very sleepily, for my eyes really wouldn't open, they felt as if somebody was holding them shut, "doesn't that bell mean that it's time to get up?"

"Oh yes, if you like you can get up," Nelly replied, without opening her eyes or raising her head from her pillow : apparently she had no wish to do anything of the kind.

"But I don't like, at all, only I thought we must," I said ; "but perhaps it's only to call the servants."

"No, it's for us," Nelly replied ; "it's one of Mrs. Comfort's whims, but she doesn't come down till breakfast time, that's one blessing,

so she hasn't the least idea whether we're down or not."

"Then we needn't get up yet?" I said, greatly relieved, and sinking down on my pillow again I was sound asleep in another moment; and I had two beautiful long dreams before Nelly called me in a great hurry, and told me that the breakfast bell would ring in next to no time.

That sounded very unpleasant, for the maid who came to help us dress had a great deal more than she could do, and we had to manage nearly all our dressing ourselves, which I found excessively awkward.

"Then you do no lessons before breakfast?" I inquired of Kate, who was struggling violently to make her way into her frock in spite of two of the hooks being fast in her hair.

"Don't talk," screamed Nelly, "you'll never be ready: and let Kate alone; don't you see what a mess she's in?"

I felt repentant; it certainly was very unkind of me to have disturbed Kate in her attempts to escape from those tiresome hooks; I suppose I ought to have offered to help her, only really I had a great deal to do myself, and I did not yet know what terrible thing might happen to me if I was late, when the breakfast bell rang.

"There!" exclaimed Kate, as the first sound was heard. "Oh, this horrid frock! it's all those hooks. And look at my hair! Bates, you must do it again."

"Indeed I can't, miss, the mistress will be angry; there, give it a smooth, and run down quick." And thus exhorted, Kate patted her frizzy locks with both hands, and scampered down-stairs after me at such speed that she came full tilt against me at the bottom, and very nearly knocked me down. It was very tiresome of her, for I wanted very much to walk into the dining-room in a quiet, sedate manner, looking as if it were a long time

since I had been up and dressed, and now I felt all flurried and in such a bustle again.

However, I had no need to be frightened or anxious. Mrs. Comfort was all smiles and good-humour, and I thought again how very different she was from the governess I had expected to see, and whom Davies had described.

It did just enter my head that she did not look quite so pleased when Miss Careless hurried into the room, even later than we were, saying something about a terribly bad night which made me pity her very much, and half hope we were going to have a holiday, as if she had been awake all night she surely could not be fit to teach in the morning. However, to my disappointment, it appeared that I was the only person who had overheard what she said, for there was no allusion made to her health, or to the necessity for us to miss our lessons; and after breakfast I was sent by Mrs. Comfort to fetch my books, that

she might examine them, and see how far advanced I was.

This was not very pleasant, for evidently the old lady thought I was very backward, and had a great deal to learn. But then I was tall for my age, and I dare say she forgot that I was only a little more than nine years old. Miss Careless, I soon found out, did not think half so badly of me, and no doubt she was a better judge, as Mrs. Comfort had left off teaching for some years. Well, when my examination was over, I went into the school-room and took my place in the writing class. I liked writing, and as Miss Careless was busy with some Berlin wool-work that I suppose she wanted to get finished, she let us write all the morning; of course we rested a little sometimes, and chatted, but we got a good deal done. I think I wrote six whole copies, which it would have taken me a week to do at home: but then Aunt Sophia was so particular; surely it was much better to get on

and fill the copy-book and have another : perhaps the next would have a prettier cover.

It is so long ago that I can't remember what we did when lessons were over on that first morning, but I suppose it was the same that day as all the other days that followed ; when we either went out for a walk, or, if Miss Careless had a headache, we played in the garden.

I am afraid she sometimes had very bad headaches, which must have made it very hard to teach, especially in the summer time, when the schoolroom used to get so hot that we could hardly keep awake in the afternoons. Some of us—that is, Nelly, and Kate, and Laura, and I, who were the biggest—used to pity her very much ; and when she looked very tired, we begged her not to mind about our music lessons, as the piano would make her so much worse ; and there was plenty of time for us to learn music yet, it did not really signify half so much as her head-

ache. She said it was very pleasant to have children who were so thoughtful, and I think she wished sometimes that Mrs. Comfort would say, as I am sure she ought to have done, "Do, Miss Careless, give yourself a holiday for once, and let the children do their lessons by themselves."

But she never did say that : I wish she had ; for it must have been hard work for one person to teach twelve children : there were twelve of us, and though there was another governess to teach the very little ones, of course, as Miss Careless said, the greater part of the work fell to her share.

We had a French master and a dancing master, and a master to teach us arithmetic ; but then she always stayed in the room to see that they did not give us too much to do, and were not cross to us, so that she was always at work in one way or another.

We did not like our masters half so much as we did her. They never could remember

that we were young, and that some of us were not very strong; and so they used to give us exercises, and verbs, and all kinds of horrid lessons to do, which I thought were only meant for boys. But then Miss Careless always smiled and said, "Do as much as you can, my dears; nobody can do more;" and that was so nice, because, as we knew quite well we couldn't do them, there was of course no use in trying. I often thought it was a pity that Mrs. Comfort did not send away M. Rével, who could not teach little girls in the least. I suppose he was only used to boys, and didn't know that young ladies should not be scolded if they cannot learn their lessons; but it was very disagreeable, for sometimes he made poor Nelly and Laura cry, and, as Miss Careless said, "French was such a silly language, that it was a great pity any-one should waste any tears over it."

Mr. Camel (I never know how to spell his name; Nelly says it has a *p* and a *b* in it, but

I can't make out where to put them) used to teach us how to do our sums;—at least he used to try, but we couldn't do sums at all, any of us. At first he tried writing a lot of figures one above another, and told us to add them all up, but he put a great many too many, and of course nobody could do them. Then he tried making two rows, and told us to take one away from the other, and that seemed easier, till he began to talk some nonsense about borrowing and paying, and then we had to give that up too. What we did next seemed all a muddle together, because at that time we didn't know our multiplication-table, which I've learned almost quite perfectly since; and you know it's more convenient to *know* that twelve twelves make a hundred and forty four, than to have to find out by making twelve strokes twelve times over on your slate and counting them all up, which was the way we did our sums with Mr. Camel. So many strokes took so much room, and if you

wrote them very close together, they were so difficult to count, that we often made mistakes; at least I know I never got one of those sums right. Mr. Camel used to sigh very often; I daresay he wished he knew how to teach better. Nelly said she didn't believe he could do his sums himself; but I think very likely he could, if he had a nice slate and pencil all to himself: the black board was always dirty, and the bits of chalk were so small that he could scarcely hold them.

Once Mrs. Comfort talked of getting us a music-master, but I suppose she changed her mind, for we never saw him; and Miss Careless went on teaching us as she had always done. We did not all learn music; only Nelly, Laura, Kate, and I, for Miss Careless thought that it was a pity for the little ones to be worried with such tiresome things as scales; "she liked to make life as easy as possible for everybody," she said, "and she often wished scales had never been in-

vented." The fact is, we all agreed with her. Before very long we gave up practising them, and only learnt pretty little airs such as our friends would like to hear us play when we went home for the holidays, which seemed to us very sensible, for who would care to hear us play scales? and besides, the tunes were so much more amusing.

Our dancing-master we generally liked; sometimes it is true he got cross, and said very rude things about our not attending to what he said, but that was not often; and Miss Careless generally contrived to put him into a good temper again.

Nobody could be cross with her, she was always so smiling and pleasant. One day in particular, I remember: I had gone to say a lesson to her in rather a fright, for I did not much think I knew it; and as it was only a little while after my first arrival at school, I was more afraid of her than afterwards. She took the book, and leant back in her chair to

hear the lesson; it was a piece of poetry, and I thought it very difficult. The first three verses I could say quite well, for I had learnt them twice before, but the fourth and fifth were my lesson, and I stuck fast at the first word and could not get on. I remembered Aunt Sophia, and expected the book would be promptly handed back to me, perhaps with the order to learn two more verses. So you may imagine how pleased I was when after helping me twice or three times, and still finding I could not say it, she gave me back the book, saying sweetly, "I am afraid I gave you too difficult a piece, we will try and find an easier for next time." So it really was not my fault at all, and therefore it seemed quite just and right that I should have the good mark which she gave me, saying, "Bad marks are such disagreeable things." But I know some of the girls thought it was very unfair; and Nelly Sandford, who always learnt her poetry very well, muttered rather

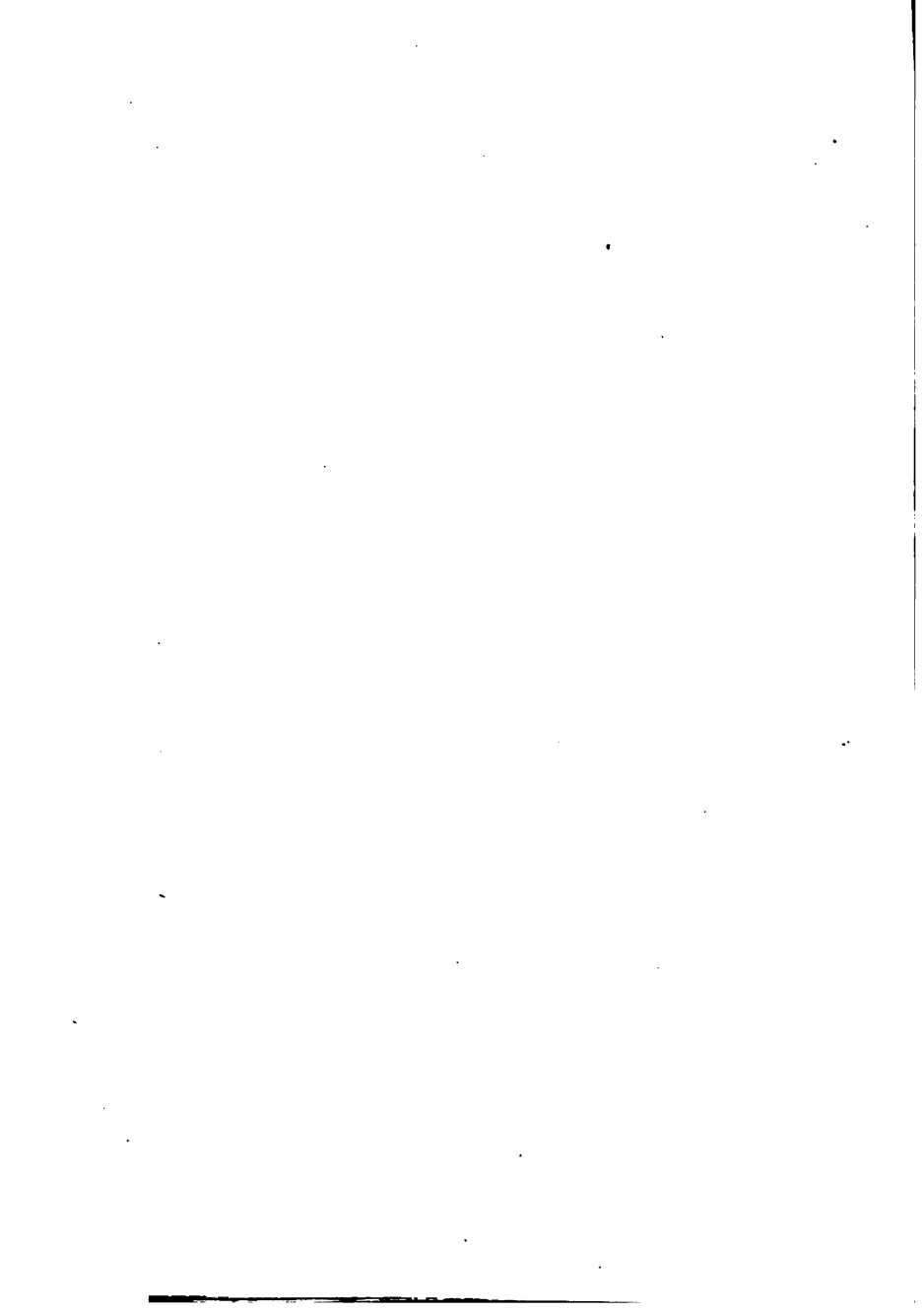
crossly that "she didn't see what was the use of having marks if people who didn't learn their lessons got them just as much as those that did."

That seemed to me very unkind of Nelly, and when I told Kate about it afterwards, and how hurt I felt that Nelly, my oldest friend, should be sorry that I had not lost my mark, she quite agreed with me that it was too bad, and she advised me to let Nelly see that I was offended; one should always keep up one's dignity, she said.

I thought so too, and so when Nelly asked me to walk with her when we went out, I turned away my head and said I would rather not, which astonished her very much indeed; but she was a great favourite in the school, and never had any difficulty in securing companions in the walks, and when she saw I was cross, she did not seem to trouble herself much about it, but turned away with a laugh, which annoyed me very much indeed.



Bad marks are such disagreeable things.



I meant her to care very much about my being angry. I had arranged it all in my head, and I thought that she would have been sure to say, "Maggie, dear, what have I done to make you vexed? Do tell me, and I promise I will never do it again;" but she said nothing of the kind, and that made me more angry than ever, and rather unhappy too.

Kate Clowes walked with me, but I did not like her half as well as Nelly, and when she, seeing I was angry still, began to say unkind things of Nelly, that made me still more unhappy, so that that was a very miserable Saturday afternoon. Yes, it began miserably, and it ended still worse. Sometimes I have thought that if we hadn't had that quarrel, and if Nelly had walked with me that Saturday afternoon, that dreadful accident would never have happened, for I was terribly afraid of horses, and never ran across the road in a hurry as some of them did. But, oh dear! I am making a muddle, as I always do: how

glad I am that this is not a history of England I am writing ; but only a history of my year at school. Supposing I had been Mrs. Markham, I know I should have put all the deaths of the kings first, which I suppose would have been a dreadful mistake, only I am sure it is the most interesting part of their reigns.

Besides, when Miss Careless taught us, that was almost the only part she made us read, or questioned us about. How William Rufus was shot in the New Forest ; how Edward II. was murdered in Berkeley Castle ; how the little princes were smothered in the Tower ; and how Charles the First's head was cut off. That was all the history we learned when I first went to school ; but I thought it was very interesting, and the laws and the battles would have been very stupid and dry.

But I had forgotten that I was going to tell about Nelly's accident, which happened the very afternoon of our quarrel. We used

to make ourselves very neat and tidy for our Saturday afternoon walks, because Miss Careless used to take us into Howton, which was the market town, and let us buy anything we liked.

My sovereign had not yet come to an end, for I had only been at school about seven weeks; but it was going very fast indeed. Kate said it did not signify, for when it was gone I could write to my Uncle for some more; but that was a plan that I didn't altogether approve of.

"You see, Kate," I said, "I never have written to Uncle Fred in all my life, and perhaps he would think it a trouble to have a letter from me."

"Oh dear no," Kate replied; "if he has never had a letter from you, he will be so delighted that he will be sure to send you a handsome present. Now I write to my Papa so often, that I am afraid he does think it a little bit of a nuisance."

"And does he send you much money?" I inquired.

"No, that is the worst of it; he sends so little that I am obliged to write again in a very little while, and that is a great bother for me too."

"Yes, indeed," I said, and felt very sorry for Kate; "but one must have money, one can't do without it at school."

"Of course not," Kate said; "there are all kinds of things one wants at school—tarts, and goodies, and toys; Papa must know I want them, so he might just as well send the money at once."

"Is he rich?" I inquired, for Kate did not wear such pretty frocks and hats as some of the girls, and the thought occurred to me that money might not be so plentiful in her Papa's pocket as it had seemed to be in my Uncle's.

"I don't know, I suppose so," she replied carelessly; "but the worst of it is, Maggie,"

she continued after a minute's hesitation, "that the last time I wrote, Mamma answered my letter instead of Papa, and she said that he was so angry with me for writing and spelling so badly, that he would not send me any more pocket-money till I improved. Now, isn't that too bad, for if my letters are untidy, it can't be my fault; Miss Careless teaches us to write and spell, and she looks over our letters, you know."

"Oh Kate," I exclaimed, "you are not going to make it out that it is her fault you don't write tidy letters; how can she help it, do you want her to write them for you?"

"No, of course not; but I can't see that it is my fault; if I don't know how to spell, what am I to do?"

"Miss Careless is so good-natured," I replied; "why, I shouldn't wonder if she let us stay and rest in the confectioner's, Kate, while the others went on for a walk; I am so tired, and I do like playing with the

tabby kitten there so much, and besides, we can get some of that candy you are so fond of."

The cloud on Kate's brow cleared away at this suggestion, and she ran off to obtain the governess's permission. It was given with Miss Careless's usual readiness, and well content, or rather highly delighted, we made ourselves at home with the kitten at the pastrycook's, and wiled away the time with the favourite sugar-candy, and the conversation of a very nice boy who was sweeping out the shop. We had never seen him before, and Kate and I were equally delighted with his readiness to talk, and with his blue eyes and rosy cheeks. We thought him much more amusing than any little girl we had ever met with, and before long we knew all about his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, his home, and everything belonging to him, so that by the time our school-fellows returned, we had

come to the conclusion that it was a great pity Mrs. Comfort did not take little boys as well as little girls, and that it would be most specially delightful if we could induce her to change her system, and receive little Jack Jones, as his name was, into her school. Something of this, our castle in the air, we confided to our new friend, and he laughed so much, that I am sure he must have agreed with us that it would be a most delightful plan, only I am afraid, he thought he was a little too old for our school, for when Kate said as we came away, "I'm only afraid you would make us look so stupid; I daresay you know a great deal more than we do," he replied, "Well, Miss, maybe I do; I reckon you don't know much about summing," which showed what a clever boy he was, for that is the very lesson we cannot do one bit; I don't know how he could have found it out.

We were very sorry when Miss Careless

and the girls came back, and we were obliged to say good-bye to the nice boy and go away; we were afraid we might never see him again, and now I come to think about it we never have, though we have often been to the shop since. I daresay he found out that he was fit for something much better than sweeping shops, and perhaps by the time I grow up he may be a great man, a great General like the Duke of Wellington, or a great Clergyman like Thomas à Becket.

Well, we went away from the shop, and were getting near home, that is, we were coming to the end of the shops and almost out of the town, when we heard a great noise behind, and Kate and I, who were walking with Miss Careless, turned round, and saw in one minute what had happened. Oh, it was dreadful! Nelly and Louey Fisk had been loitering behind, looking into the shop windows, and they had run across the

road to overtake us just at the minute that one of those horrid omnibuses that drive so fast was coming along the road. Louey had got safely across, but poor Nelly, who was just behind her, was too late, the horse had knocked her down, and when we turned round she seemed to be quite underneath his feet. I am sure the driver might have stopped if he had liked, but he didn't, and the wheel went right over poor Nelly's arm. Only think ! the wheel of the heavy omnibus. I don't know what we did or said, but I know we all cried out to Miss Careless to save her ; of course she couldn't, it was too late, but I do think she might have run and picked her up, instead of trembling all over and looking as if she were going to faint too, which only made us all wonder still more what we were to do.

How the children did cry and scream ; and Kate, and Laura, and I, who went to help poor Nelly, were so frightened that we

trembled and shook all over. And Nelly, she looked just as white as if she were dead, for though I've never seen anybody dead, I am quite sure nobody ever could look any whiter, so I'm not exaggerating in the least. And when she didn't move, that was dreadful, we felt quite sure in a moment that she was dead, and to be sure, who could expect to be alive after an omnibus had gone over them.

"Oh, Miss Careless!" cried Laura, while we stood still staring at Nelly, "what are we to do, what will Nelly's mother say?"

But Miss Careless only sat on the ground and gasped, as the fish do when Uncle Fred catches them and leaves them to die on the bank, only they do it because they feel very bad, and I am only half sure that Miss Careless felt bad at all. We tried to lift Nelly, but we were so afraid of hurting her, though we thought then that she was dead, that we couldn't manage it, and what we should have done I can't imagine, had not a



Those drivers are so careless.



lady, who saw us all crowding together in the middle of the road, come to see what was the matter. She lifted Nelly up in a minute, and carried her very gently indeed into a shop that was not far off, while we all trooped after her, and then, to our surprise, Miss Careless grew better directly, and came running after us to tell the lady how it had all happened. What she said, I didn't quite hear, in fact, I wasn't listening much, for the lady had carried Nelly into a chemist's shop, and as he seemed to be a kind of doctor, I wanted very much to hear whether he thought she was dead or not.

At least, I mean whether he thought she was going to die, because when the lady picked her up she had opened her eyes, which showed that she was not quite dead, though she still looked so white that I felt quite sure she was only half alive. It was therefore a great comfort to see that she could swallow some medicine which he gave, and which

seemed to do her a great deal of good, for she opened her eyes again quite wide and stared at all of us, and then she began to cry quite bitterly. Most of us then remembered how frightened we were, and there was such a sobbing, that the lady, who had still got Nelly on her lap, looked troubled, and turning to Miss Careless, said, "It really seems to me that you had better take these children home, and I will bring this poor little thing in a fly as soon as she is fit to move; if you leave one of the bigger ones with me, she may be some help." She looked at me as she said this, and Nelly faintly whispered my name. "Maggie, is it?" the lady said; "very well, Maggie shall stay."

"And I will hasten home and prepare Mrs. Comfort; poor thing! how distressed she will be," said Miss Careless, rising, as it seemed to me very willingly, to comply with our new friend's suggestion. "Dear me," she added,

as she summoned the children to accompany her, "I get almost tired of the care of these giddy little people; to think that one cannot even keep them from getting under the horses' feet! But those drivers are so careless"—she vanished as she said this, and the lady gazed after her with a strange smile on her face; then she turned to try and soothe poor Nelly, who was crying sadly. "What is it hurts you, my poor child?" she inquired; "am I not nursing you comfortably?" "It's my arm," sobbed Nelly, and the master of the shop, who was still standing by her, took hold of the little hand that hung by her side, but as he touched it, she screamed out as if he was killing her, and he laid it gently down again. "A broken bone, I am afraid," he said, and the lady's kind face grew sad with pity.

"We must take you home, dear," she said, "and then Mrs. Comfort will get a doctor to come and mend it for you. You must try

and bear the pain a little longer, for, see, there is the fly, and we shall soon be at home."

I don't suppose it really was many minutes, but that drive seemed to me to last hours, for though I am sure she tried to be patient, Nelly could not help sobbing and crying dreadfully. The lady talked to her very kindly ; only once she spoke to me, and then it was to ask the name of our governess. I told it, and then the funny look came over her face again. "Miss Careless," she said, "a very good name indeed." I wondered what made her say that, for nobody could think that Miss Careless could have prevented the horses from running over Nelly, that certainly was Nelly's own fault for crossing the road in front of them. How I wished I had been walking with her, I was quite sure I should never have let her be so foolish ; well, it was of no use to wish that now ; if we hadn't quarrelled, the mischief might never have happened.

All that they did to poor Nelly when we

got her home I can't tell, because they took her into Mrs. Comfort's room, and we were all shut out. I am afraid they hurt her very much, for when I saw her the next day, in a little bed in Mrs. Comfort's room, she looked so pale and ill that I should hardly have known who it was, if I had not been quite sure it could be nobody but Nelly. She was ill a long time; it wasn't only her arm, but something that the doctor called a shock to the nerves; what that could be I do not know, I thought only grown-up people had nerves, but I suppose it was something catching, for they wouldn't let any one of us see her for ever so long, and she stayed in the large room where Kate told me she slept when she had the measles.

CHAPTER III.

COMING CHANGES.

FOR some time after Nelly's accident, Mrs. Comfort was so nervous about us that we were never allowed to walk in the town on Saturdays, which was very tiresome, because though it was very sad about poor Nelly, it did seem rather hard that we should have to go without our goodies and cakes just because she had broken her arm.

I think Miss Careless thought so too, and when she went into the town to make her purchases, she very good-naturedly undertook any little commissions that we entrusted to her. But then she was always good-natured; I don't think I ever saw her cross, though sometimes I fancied Mrs. Comfort was not

very kind to her, and treated her as if it was her fault that Nelly had been run over; which of course was quite a mistake. Perhaps old people do make mistakes sometimes, though they often seem to think that is quite impossible; however that may be, I am quite sure it is very easy to take them in sometimes, and that I found out at the time of that great uproar in the bedroom, which I said I would describe in its proper place.

It was while Nelly was still ill, and sleeping in the room called the infirmary, that this commotion occurred. Nelly, you know, was the most prudent of us six, and though we had had grand romps often before, nobody had ever heard us, because she was so clever, and always stopped us when there was any danger of our being heard. But while she was ill we got much more rash, and as Miss Careless had come in more than once in the middle of our games, and had not seemed to see any harm in our playing if we liked, we

had begun to think it must be all nonsense to say that there was any harm in it. So it happened one night when we had made round balls of all our pillows, and were pelting each other with them and having the grandest fun, a sudden stop was put to our game by Kate calling out—"There! I heard Mrs. Comfort's voice on the stairs, I am sure I did; lie down all of you, and pretend you're sound asleep."

For a few minutes we obeyed, but no sound being audible but our own panting breath, our fears were soon laid to rest; and in a very few minutes we ventured to rise and resume our game. It grew very exciting; my pillow at length disappeared altogether, I suppose under one of the beds, and eager to find something to fling at my adversary in the opposite bed, I snatched up my shoe, and threw it with all my force—unfortunately not at her, but at the window, which was above her bed. There was a sound of smashing glass, and a dead

silence followed in the room that had been so noisy a minute ago, for never in all our romps had we had such an accident before. Often and often had we upset the water-jugs, soaked the pillows and the carpet, and torn the sheets, but though these accidents drew down on us the anger of the servants, they only complained to Miss Careless, and she only laughed and seemed to think it all as great fun as we did.

But a broken window was a much more serious affair; that could hardly be mended without Mrs. Comfort knowing something about it, and, during the few minutes of perfect silence that followed, we were all wondering within ourselves how we could possibly explain the accident without revealing the secret of our nightly frolics.

“What shall we do?” I whispered at last, “What will Mrs. Comfort say?”

There was a dead silence, and then Kate spoke in a low tone; she was the eldest in

the room, and we therefore naturally expected and waited for her opinion.

"Maggie," she said, "I have thought of a capital plan; but if anybody asks you how it happened, don't pretend to know anything about it, and then Mrs. Comfort will think you were all asleep. You had better say I know, and then I shall be asked, and I have made up a splendid plan."

"But what is it? Do tell us, Kate, why shouldn't we know; we need not tell, you shall do that if you like."

"No, no, you had better know nothing about it; leave it to me, and I will settle it all beautifully."

"But, Kate, why shouldn't you tell us?"

"Hush, hush, there is a light, see, under the crack of the door; let's pretend to be sound asleep."

"Young ladies," said the voice of Bates, the maid who dressed and attended to us, "Mrs. Comfort wants to know who it is that

has been breaking a window. She heard the noise herself in her own bedroom, and a terrible noise too, she says, she heard before it, and I must say I'm glad you're found out at last."

"What is it, Bates?" inquired Kate, in such a sleepy tone that anybody might have imagined she was only half-awake; "the window broken, oh, yes, I know, never mind, tell Mrs. Comfort it was an accident. I'll tell her all about it in the morning."

"That's not a proper answer to send Mrs. Comfort, Miss Clowes; she asked who did it, and you ought to tell her."

"It was all dark, how can I tell? Do go away, Bates, or you'll wake the others."

"They were wide enough awake not five minutes ago," said Bates; "but I'm not going till I've fastened something up to keep out the night air, or you'll catch your deaths of cold, with such a wind blowing in, and such a cold night."

Whether Bates really believed that we were asleep and did not wish to disturb us, I haven't the least idea; but as Kate seemed determined not to answer any questions, and all the rest of us appeared to be asleep, she quietly fastened a shawl over the broken window, and then departed to tell Mrs. Comfort that she knew no more than she did of the matter, and that Miss Clowes had said she would tell all about it in the morning. After this, you may easily imagine, we did not resume our games; the news that Mrs. Comfort was in the room underneath ours was sufficiently alarming to keep us quiet for the rest of the night, though I confess I lay awake a long time, wondering what excuse Kate could possibly invent that would account for the hubbub Mrs. Comfort must have heard before the noise of the breaking glass had made her send Bates to make inquiries. I fell asleep before I had come to any conclusion, and when I woke the next morning,

Kate was just as determined as ever not to reveal anything of her intentions.

“I will settle it all most comfortably,” she said, laughing, “and when I have told Mrs. Comfort, then I will tell you, that you may not make any mistake if she asks any questions.”

This was all we could get out of her. She dressed as fast as possible and ran downstairs; but just before the breakfast-bell rang she re-appeared, clapping her hands triumphantly. “I have done it beautifully; now mind that none of you make any mistakes, do exactly as I tell you, and we shall be perfectly safe.”

“But what have you been saying, Kate?” we inquired all together, relieved, it is true, to hear that the matter was to be hushed up; but extremely curious to know how she could have satisfied Mrs. Comfort in those few minutes.

“I told Mrs. Comfort that we had a terrible fright last night. We thought there

was a cat in the room, and that the little ones were dreadfully scared ; but that it was so dark that we could see nothing, and so we threw our shoes about the room to try and frighten it away ; and that I supposed it was one of the shoes that hit the window and broke it. I said we were very sorry to think we had frightened her, and that we had no idea that she had had a headache. Oh, she is a dear old thing ! she was perfectly satisfied directly, pitied us for our fright, but said we should have rung the bell for Bates. Isn't it fun now ? Mind you don't spoil my story for me, any of you, by blushing or looking foolish if she asks you questions."

We all promised to do our best to keep the secret ; but for my own part I know I felt very uncomfortable at having such a secret to keep. Though I had never been able to see any harm in our having games in bed, I could see very plainly that there was harm in telling stories about them. How

I wished I could believe that any one of us had had any fear of there being a cat in the room; but no, such an idea I knew well had never entered any one's head. Thinking in this way, it struck me that if there really was no harm in our games at night, it was very strange we should mind confessing frankly how the accident had happened. Yet mind it we did, most assuredly. It was altogether very uncomfortable; but I hadn't time to think it out well, for it happened to be one of the days when we didn't do much lessons. Miss Careless was in a very merry mood, and she told us so many stories that morning that we did nothing but laugh. So by degrees I got rid of my unpleasant thoughts about Kate and the story she had told for us, just as one gets rid of the taste of castor-oil if one doesn't think about it; but after that we were more careful not to play such noisy games, unless we were quite quite sure Mrs. Comfort was busy downstairs, or out at a tea-party.

But these merry days were not to last for ever; school was to become a very different place, and I must begin to tell how that came about;—at least all I know about it, for Mrs. Comfort never told us what made her take such an idea into her head, though many of the girls thought she certainly ought to have asked them whether they would like to have another governess. Perhaps she knew quite well what they would say, and so thought it best not to tell us till it was all settled; but we did want very much to know why it was she took such a dislike to poor dear Miss Careless.

She told us it was because we had become so unruly; but Kate, and Laura, and I, fancied it was partly because of Nelly's accident, and partly because some of the girls got quarrelling one day in the garden, and two of them pushed each other down, and one of them had her eye badly cut, and the other sprained her ankle. It really was very tiresome, coming



Children are made of India-rubber, that's one comfort.

so soon after Nelly's accident; for as Miss Careless said, "Children are certainly made of india-rubber, and do not generally hurt themselves in the least when they tumble about; so who was to guess that they were likely to hurt themselves then."

It certainly was most careless, and I do believe Mrs. Comfort took it into her head that Miss Careless might have prevented it if she had taken the trouble, and so the poor dear thing had to go. It was a very melancholy day when we said good-bye to her, and when she was quite gone we went back into the schoolroom, and cried to think what a miserable time we should have with the new governess who was coming. Miss Careless had told us what she would be like—grave, stern, and silent. "My dears," Miss Careless had said the evening before, "take my advice: do not speak to her unless she speaks to you—such people like quiet children; and remember never to laugh or smile—some governesses

think all children idle and silly who laugh much."

What a dreadful idea ! what an insufferable person she will be ! Though Miss Careless does not know her, she is sure to be right in what she says : new people are always horrid. "And then Mrs. Comfort says she is coming to get us into order again," suggested Laura. "I wonder what that means ; that we are never to have any fun any more, I suppose ; that we are to say all our lessons without missing a word, as people do in story-books ; that we are to walk two-and-two like charity school children when we go for a walk ; and that we are never—no, never—to buy any goodies or dolls in the shop."

"I shall get my mamma to take me away," muttered Dolly Davies.

"She will never make me learn my lessons, because I can't," sighed Helen Attwood.

"I shall hate her, I know," exclaimed Kate

Clowes; and though I didn't say it, I thought so too.

Yes, we were very dismal, and when, just as the bell rang for tea, Mrs. Comfort opened the door and ushered our new governess into the schoolroom, I don't know which of us looked the most discontented and miserable. She must have wondered what was the matter with us, for till Mrs. Comfort told us to do so, not one of us moved from her seat, or looked up, or said "How do you do."

We were very glad when she went upstairs with Miss Phillips, the little ones' governess, to get ready for tea, for then, nobody being in the room, we could talk about her to our hearts' content.

Everybody had something to say; with our minds still full of our dear Miss Careless, we could only think how different Miss Power was. There were several of the girls who could remember the happy day when Miss Careless first came, and though that was months

before I first came to school, I had often heard about it, and been told how much nicer she was than the lady who had taught them before. And now everyone was eloquent in contrasting her arrival with that of Miss Power.

"Don't you remember," said Kate, "how she came in smiling, and kissed us all round, and was quite sure we were always good?"

"And how she hoped that we didn't work too hard," said Fanny, who wasn't at all too fond of lessons, and would certainly never have been guilty of any such folly.

"She had such a pretty blue dress on," cried Dolly, who had a weakness for blue, and always dressed her doll in that colour.

"And this Miss Power has a hideous black thing, just like people wear in shops," I exclaimed; "oh, I daresay her mother keeps a shop."

That was considered by my companions a most brilliant idea, and we spent some time longer wondering what kind of shop it was

most probable Mrs. Power kept. "If it were only a sweet-shop," remarked Dolly, "I wouldn't mind, for then of course she would have plenty of sugar-plums to give us."

"We shall never get anything sweet out of her," Kate replied decidedly, and then, as in duty bound, we all looked very miserable.

Tea that evening was a very quiet meal. Mrs. Comfort did not object to our talking, provided we did not make too much noise; but on this particular evening we were much too sad to talk. But though our tongues were for the time unemployed, our eyes were fully occupied, I might say doing double duty, for they were minutely examining every particular of Miss Power's dress, appearance, and manners, and conveying in sidelong glances our impressions to each other. That they were not favourable might easily have been seen. Miss Power had large brown eyes, and brown eyes, we told each other, were hideous. Miss Careless had soft blue eyes,

exactly the right shape and colour; they never seemed to see further than we wished, and never looked cross or severe. But Miss Power's were quite different; they looked as if they saw all that you were thinking about in the very back of your head, and I could hardly help thinking that, without turning her head, she saw what was going on behind her.

Then, when Miss Careless spoke she always smiled; I don't think she could help it; but I didn't see Miss Power smile once the whole of tea-time. Her face was quite still, and when she looked at you you couldn't tell in the least whether she liked or disliked you. But the worst of all was she was so tall and straight; she looked as if she could not bend and stoop, and when I looked at her, she seemed so far above me, that I began to think it must be a mistake to say I was tall for my age.

I didn't like tall people, and I was not at all surprised to hear Dolly say, as we went



“Is it true that some people swallow pokers?”

back to the schoolroom, "I wonder whether it is true that people swallow poker."

I had been thinking the same thing all tea-time, because, you see, Miss Careless used to lean back in her chair at tea-time, and make herself comfortable, but Miss Power sat as straight up as if she could not stoop if she had been paid to do it. To look at her only made me feel a great lump in my throat, and a great weight on my chest, just as if I had been eating too much roly-poly pudding; in fact there must have been something strange about her, for, from the moment we saw her, we all felt quite ill. Helen said she had the headache; Kate said she felt as if she could not help crying; and as for poor Dolly, who had been very, very fond of Miss Careless, she did have a good cry before she went to sleep.

The house was like a prison that evening; everybody seemed afraid to speak, and though nobody had told us to be quiet in our bed-

rooms we did not venture to play our games as usual after we had gone to bed. We only talked quietly, lying on our backs in our little beds, and told each other dreadful tales of harsh governesses, and cruel schoolmasters and mistresses. Kate and Laura were the two who always told the best stories, and Kate in particular had some capital stories to tell about the numerous governesses she had had before she came to school. It seemed to me that she must have had a great many; I don't know whether they all taught her at the same time, but as she was only ten years old it did seem very funny that she should have had four or five different people to teach her. Perhaps she was so clever that her mamma could not find anybody that knew enough to teach her; but it must have been very funny to have had people always coming and trying, and then going away in despair. She told us that she was never taught to read; she fancied she knew how to do that when she was born, for she

had heard her mamma say she was passionately fond of books when she was a baby in arms ; and she thought the first governess she had, tried to teach her to write. She could not remember that lady's name, but she knew quite well that she did not succeed in teaching her to write ; she believed it was because her own writing was so bad ; Kate said she could never make out one word she wrote.

"Then that was why she went away, wasn't it," I inquired, but Kate could not answer that question ; "It was so long ago, she couldn't remember," she said.

"And did you ever have a governess who was unkind to you, as this horrid Miss Power will be," somebody asked.

"Oh, yes, I had two dreadful governesses just before I came to school."

"What! two at once ; oh, dreadful !"

"No, not at once ; one only stayed a fortnight : she wanted me to learn French verbs, and they were too difficult, and I believe

Mamma thought they were of no use, so she went away, and I was very glad."

"Why? because of the verbs?"

"No, not only the verbs. But she was so cross. She would not let me go to a birthday party because she said I had been lazy, and when I called her a cross old thing, she sent me to bed."

"What a shame!" we all exclaimed.

"Yes, but she went away, and then we did have a dreadful creature."

"What did she do? oh, do tell us, Kate!"

"Why, you know we are all—I mean my brothers and sisters and I—what people call very high-spirited children. You know what that means, don't you? Well, this Miss James—that was her name—wanted to make us silly tame children who would do anything they were told. She wanted us to be perfectly silent over our lessons—never to speak unless she spoke to us; and our great battle was about that. We meant to talk as we always had,

and when she began saying 'Hush, and be quiet,' we began to laugh. Then she said that was rude, and if we did it again she would give us a long lesson to learn. Then James, who is very funny and cunning, made such a queer face at her, and said, 'Do, I'd like to see you,' which made us all laugh again. Then she told James to go out of the room, which made us laugh again, and though she said nothing, I know she was so angry she didn't know what to do."

"And did James go when she told him," I inquired.

"No, he didn't move; Jem is very determined, and he didn't see why he should go out of the room before any of the rest of us; so he sat still, and Miss James got up, and came and actually turned him out of the room, and left him standing in the cold hall, though it was a bitterly cold winter's day. Wasn't it cruel? he might have caught cold and died."

"Of course he might," Laura replied. "But

did you ever get turned out of the room, Kate?"

"No, but I was sent to bed once, and that was much worse, for that very afternoon some little friends came to see us, and of course they wondered where I was; they asked Jem and Mabel several times."

"And was that the reason Miss James went away," I inquired: "I mean, was it because she couldn't manage you?"

"I don't know, I never heard, but I think it was something of the kind. Mamma said we ought to be managed by love, and I don't think Miss James agreed with her; at least, I know that one day when Jem made a face at her, she got so angry that she gave him a box on the ears with a book; that wasn't love, was it?"

"How cruel! why, she might have broken his head," we all exclaimed; but at that minute we heard footsteps on the stairs, and most of us thought it prudent to remain quiet

and appear to be sound asleep. But we were quite wide enough awake to hear a good deal of a conversation that went on just outside the door, and as we listened to it, all the hopes that we had cherished died away.

“It was only a few nights ago,” we heard Mrs. Comfort say, “that I was going through this passage after the children had gone to bed, and I heard such a noise that I am convinced they were romping as if it were broad daylight; but when I opened the door, to all appearance they were fast asleep. So you see, Miss Power, your eyes will have to be very wide open in this house, if you are to undo the mischief that my last governess did.”

What Miss Power replied, we could not hear, she spoke in a very low tone; but we all said to ourselves that there was very little doubt but that her eyes would be always open; they looked as if they never shut; and before long we came to the conclusion that she slept with them wide open.

I don't think we were any of us inclined to think Mrs. Comfort quite as nice as we had before we heard her make this speech ; it seemed to me that she might have let Miss Power find out things for herself, and in my vexation at discovering that all chance of a continuance of our merry evenings was at an end, I almost forgot the thoughts that Kate's story had put into my head.

But I remember now that while I was listening to her, though I said I thought Miss James was very cruel, because all the others said so, I could not help thinking to myself that if a boy had made a face at me, and I had had a book in my hand, I should have done just the same ; but then I don't like boys, which Kate says is very odd of me, and I daresay it is.

We felt very queer when we woke the next morning ; it was quite early, directly after the first bell, that Bates came into the room, and told us all that we must get up. She looked very cross, and no wonder, for it must have

been very hard to be up and dressed by seven o'clock. I know I felt quite cross, and so dreadfully sleepy I didn't know what to do.

Kate and Laura declared that they wouldn't get up for another half-hour, and told her to go away, which made her very angry with us.

"You are to get up at once; Mrs. Comfort bade me call you exactly at seven, and see that you got up at once. Miss Power, she said, would expect you in the schoolroom at half-past; so you had best be quick, I can tell you. You especially, Miss Clowes; you are more than half an hour in your dressing most days."

We all sat up and stared; our miseries were really beginning too soon; we had not thought about this, or we might have guessed that the new governess would begin by insisting upon obedience to this, Mrs. Comfort's favourite rule. But were we really to submit? For the present it seemed that we must, and accordingly, most reluctantly, we tumbled out of bed, and addressed ourselves to the task of

dressings. But we would have our revenge; we would not bear such tyranny; we would either get rid of Miss Power or get our parents to take us away.

So we grumbled on, and in spite of Bates' exhortations nothing would induce us to hurry ourselves, and the clock on the stairs had long struck the half-hour before any of us made our appearance in the schoolroom.

Our new governess was already there; and as Laura and I stole into the room together, feeling very rebellious, and yet not altogether at our ease, I remember it made me still more uncomfortable to feel that her large grave eyes were following me as I moved across the room to my accustomed seat. I had nothing to do, no lessons to learn, and as I sat there waiting for the breakfast bell to ring, it did seem to me extremely ridiculous that our morning dreams had been interrupted, merely that we might come downstairs and sit staring out of window, doing nothing. And why was she watch-



We felt very cross.

ing us in that way. If she had anything to say why didn't she say it, instead of looking at us as if we were some strange insects that she had never seen before.

I began to think she had nothing to say, and to wonder whether she ever spoke, for really I had scarcely heard her utter a syllable. How different to poor dear Miss Careless, who was as fond of chatting as any of us children!

What a weary, weary time we seemed to be at lessons that morning. I can remember pretty well all about it. First, we did our writing. I used to be fond of writing in Miss Careless' time, but it was a very different matter now. How cross Miss Power was: nobody held their pens properly, everybody stooped too much—in fact, nobody could please her. She found fault with Laura for inking her fingers, and took no notice at all when Laura said it was because the pen was bad; she told Dolly not to put her head on one side and squint at her writing, with her

tongue half out of her mouth, which was very tiresome, for Dolly said she could see much better with her head on one side, and how could it possibly signify to anybody else how she sat?

I really could not help thinking that it was no business of hers; surely as long as we wrote our copies when she told us, and stopped when she said we had done enough, that was all that she had to do with the matter. And then in the geography lesson, she was just as meddling and particular. With Miss Careless we had learned our geography by heart, which was much the simplest plan, and saved a great deal of trouble; but Miss Power told us to get our atlases and find the places; she said there was no use at all in our knowing that Paris was the capital of France, if we had no idea where France or Paris was. It was very tiresome, for, you see, we hadn't the least idea where the atlases had gone; they had vanished long ago, but where to, nobody could tell. Dolly thought

she had used some of the maps out of hers to paper her doll's house, because they had bright colours, and I thought I had seen the cover of one of them at the bottom of the garden, set up as a tombstone over Nelly's pet canary's grave.

But you know we couldn't say so, and we didn't like to say that they had vanished, so when she told us to fetch them, we all went to our cupboards, and had a great hunt, though we knew perfectly well that they were not there, and that it was long since we had seen any of them.

I suppose that at last she got tired of waiting; for before we had even been able to produce a stray leaf, or the smallest relic of the books in question, she called us back to our seats, and proceeded to give the lesson by referring to a large map of Europe which hung on the schoolroom wall.

She began by asking us such queer questions about spheres, and zones, and penin-

sulas, and isthmuses, and all kinds of long words that I had scarcely ever heard of. Of course we couldn't answer her, which was rather tiresome, because, though we didn't want to please her, we had no wish to look very stupid, when of course we really weren't ; it was only her queer way of teaching that puzzled us.

If she had only asked me the names of all the rivers in France, I could have told her, for I knew quite well that they are called Seine, and that Paris is built upon them ; Miss Careless told us so, and though it does seem strange that a town should be built on a river instead of on the land, it must be true, because she said so, and I suppose it is only the French who do such odd things.

Miss Power tried to make us appear very stupid ; I suppose because she thought we should respect her more if she seemed wiser than we were ; but it really was quite impossible to believe all the things she told us ;

Nelly says she believes she was making fun of us, and trying what stupid things she could make us believe; but if so, she must have been disappointed, for I am quite sure that nobody but Dolly, who is certainly very silly, could possibly have believed that the English Channel is several miles across, and that Spain and Africa are not almost joined. Why, I believe you could almost step across, and I am quite sure that if one took a good run, it would be as easy as possible to jump across the Straits of Gibraltar. When I am big I mean to go and try.

Well, she told us it was quite a long way, and I daresay she thought we believed it; but of course we were not quite so silly.

Then, in history, she taught us so differently from Miss Careless, and made such a fuss about all kinds of stupid little things that did not signify one bit. I can't tell you what a fuss she made about some stupid piece of paper that King John signed; she actually

made us learn the name of it, though it was in some foreign language, Hebrew or Greek, I believe ; and she did not tell us half as much as Miss Careless did about poor Prince Arthur, which is really much more interesting, and of course more important.

You will not, therefore, be surprised to hear that we found lessons much harder work than we used to, and often and often we wished that Miss Power were as fond of fancy work as Miss Careless had been. It was so pleasant when she said, as she often did, "Now, my dears, amuse yourselves as you like ; I want particularly to finish this rose this morning ;" it gave us a nice little rest, and as she often said, we worked much better afterwards. But with Miss Power, such a thing as rest was not to be thought of. If one moment any of us chanced to look off our books, her eyes, those big dark eyes, were fixed upon us ; and every movement we made was discovered and watched.

"We shall all grow like children in books," Laura exclaimed one day, when we were all freed from her presence and sent to play.

It was a wet Saturday afternoon; there was no chance of the rain clearing off, and so we had been sent to play in a large empty room, which we were accustomed to call the play-room, because it was seldom used for any other purpose. We had been sent to play, but for once we preferred to talk—to talk about our grievances, and to pity ourselves, for really we did feel that we had great cause for complaint, and that it was only right to feel very sorry for ourselves.

"We shall all grow like the good children we read about in books," Laura repeated dismally—"like the children who always do what they are told, who like to be punished, and who are just like grown-up people cut shorter."

We all felt that this would be a terrible state of things. Nobody wanted to be grown-

up yet, for grown-up people are grave and steady, and never laugh or jump down ten stairs at once, or walk in puddles, or tell stories in bed, or, in short, do any of the nice things that children do. Neither did we want to be like the good children in books. Ellen Montgomery in the "Wide, Wide World," and Fleda in "Queechy," were good little girls both of them, I suppose, but they used to cry whole bucketsful of tears, so that I never thought they could be very happy. "I will never be like a child in a story-book," I exclaimed; "I will never do exactly what I am told, to please anybody; and as for Miss Power——"

"Well, Maggie?" said three or four of my schoolfellows; several of them were crowding round, waiting to hear what I had to say, for since Nelly had been ill I had been quite one of the elder ones, for Laura and Kate were the only ones who were older than me, and they were



"Now, listen, I have an idea."

beginning to think a good deal of my opinion ;—" Well, Maggie ? "

" As for Miss Power," I continued, " we must get rid of her ; school will be unbearable if she stays. "

" It is unbearable now," Laura muttered ; " nothing but learn, learn, morning, noon, and night, and no fun nor anything of the kind. "

" And yet," said Kate, " I don't see how we can get rid of her ; it's not so easy, Maggie. "

" Not easy," I exclaimed, " no, perhaps not ; but we can do it if we only try. Now listen ; I have an idea. "

" Yes, listen ; Maggie's ideas are always good," echoed two or three voices, and greatly flattered I proceeded :—

" You know, if we can only make her miserable, she will have to go. Miss Careless said a governess's life was a very hard one, and if we had not been so kind she

should never have been able to bear the hard work here. So if we are not kind you see it is quite plain Miss Power will have to go."

There was a dead silence after this speech of mine, which made me feel rather uncomfortable. To advise people seriously to be unkind did not sound quite nice, but then, as I had often heard, strong measures are sometimes necessary. I had often thought that it didn't seem quite nice or kind of Cromwell and his friends to cut off poor Charles the First's head, but then I had heard it said that it was a good thing for the country, and that Cromwell was a patriot after all. So it seemed to me that though it mightn't be pleasant or sound nice to say such things, it must be the right thing to do, for if we were really to do what we wanted and make Miss Power go, it was high time we made our plans; to be meek first and then suddenly break out in open rebellion would never do.

CHAPTER IV.

DECIDEDLY PUT OUT.

NO, it would never do, and yet it was not as easy as you might have imagined to get all the girls to join in our schemes fully and entirely. Some of them thought they sounded dangerous ; if we were very disagreeable Miss Power might, they said, complain to Mrs. Comfort, and she might, though nobody thought it was very likely she would do so, yet she might send us home in disgrace, which some of us thought would not be quite as pleasant as going home for the holidays. Then others thought that though she did give us long lessons, and was absurdly particular about our learning them perfectly, that these were the worst of her faults, and that in other

respects there was no harm in her. It made me quite cross to hear these girls talk ; they had no spirit, and if we had listened to them we should very soon have been as tame as they were—which, however, now I come to think of it, might have saved us a good deal of trouble in the end.

But we didn't think of that then, and so we planned and plotted, and made as grand schemes as ever Guy Fawkes or any of his friends did. Still it was very tiresome that Clara Payne and Alice Stevens, whom Mrs. Comfort always called the best girls in the school, would look grave and keep aloof, as if they meant to have nothing to do with us.

Kate and Laura said it did not signify, that we could do very well without them, but I did not think so ; I felt quite sure that if we all persisted in doing our lessons badly, and in making ourselves disagreeable, Miss Power would be obliged to go ; but if she found any of us tame enough to do what she told us, the

case would be very different. And before long I told Clara so, and let her know very plainly that I thought her unkind to desert our cause and go over to Miss Power's side ; it seemed to me quite mean and dishonourable, I said, and Laura joined in heartily, till Clara began to feel rather ashamed of herself.

"I don't know what you mean by saying I am deserting you," she said, getting very red. "Deserting means running away, and I am not going to run away, I am sure."

"Deserting doesn't always mean running away," I said, "but you know, Clara, that it is too bad of you not to join with us, and do just as we do ; it isn't kind or friendly, or like a good schoolfellow."

Clara looked puzzled ; she was younger than I was, and I daresay didn't find it very easy to argue with anyone older than herself, so she only said, half crying, "I don't know why you are all so cross because I've learned my lessons ; they were very hard, and I think

you ought to help me instead of trying to make it out that I've done something naughty."

"Oh, we didn't mean that," I said, in a great hurry, for I wanted to stop Clara's crying; it would have been so tiresome if she had had red eyes at tea-time. "You haven't done anything naughty, I am sure; for some reasons it was very good indeed of you to learn those horrid lessons; but, you see, Clara, you mustn't think only about yourself; you are very clever, and I daresay if you try very hard you may be able to learn any of the lessons Miss Power sets us, but there are lots of us that can't, and so the only way will be to put a stop to Miss Power's way of going on, and let her know that it is of no use for her to set us tasks twice as long and twice as difficult as those we have been used to."

Clara looked thoughtful; she liked to be told that she was clever, and I knew that quite well, so I continued, "You don't know, Clara,

what it is to be stupid, and find yourself condemned to learn all kinds of things which you don't understand. Now I am not so stupid as some people, but really and truly I could not learn that Avoirdupois table if I tried till next year, so you see I gave it up. But if you go on learning all your lessons as if they gave you no trouble at all she will keep on making them longer and longer till our poor heads split or we go out of our minds."

"And then we should be maniacs," said Laura solemnly; she had learned that word in her spelling that morning, and felt that this was exactly the right moment to make use of it; and so it was, for Clara positively started when she heard it, and looked at me trembling.

"Maniacs," she repeated, "what are they?"

"People that have been driven wild by unkindness," I replied. "The moon drives some people wild, I believe; but there is another name for them, isn't there, Laura?"

“Yes, lunatics,” replied Laura, triumphantly. “I suppose ‘maniac’ means a person who has been driven mad by the unkindness of some man; the word sounds like it.”

“Or by some woman,” I said; “I am sure Miss Power will drive me mad if she stays here long enough.”

“But there’s no word for that, is there?” inquired Clara anxiously.

“The word does not much signify,” I exclaimed impatiently, “the thing is the same, and it must be dreadful to go mad.”

“There’s one kind of sum that always sends people mad, I believe,” suggested Laura, “I suppose she will teach us that directly.”

“If we will learn it; but we won’t,” I asserted vehemently. “Clara, don’t you see now that we must be determined, and not let her drive us just as she likes, as if we were so many sheep.”

But still Clara looked only half convinced; I am afraid she was of a very obstinate dispo-

sition ; however, after this talk, we all noticed that neither she nor Alice seemed to care so much about pleasing Miss Power as they had done before. You know, though it is very pleasant to be liked by the governesses, it is still nicer to be a favourite with the girls ; and I suppose they thought there was something in what I said, after all.

Of course it was quite impossible to believe that they would really like Miss Power, or wish to make her like them ; all they cared for was to get good marks, and so win the prizes—if such things as prizes were ever to be given while Miss Power was governess. Neither Alice nor Clara had ever slept in our room, so they did not perhaps know anything about the fun we used to have there when Miss Careless was our governess, and how it had been stopped, and how cross we were about it.

For after that first evening when we had overheard Mrs. Comfort telling Miss Power

that we made a great noise in our bedrooms, and that she must watch us closely, we had never ventured to romp or have half the fun we used to have. It was quite dull work going to bed now; for instead of the maid taking away the candle as she used to do, Miss Power herself came, and after watching us all into bed as gravely as if it was very important which foot we put into bed first, would go away charging us not to speak a word, but to go to sleep at once.

That we were quite determined not to do; because we didn't like to be ordered and lectured about such trifles; and so most of us stayed awake as long as we possibly could, and as Laura's bed and mine were close together, we used to play little quiet games of our own of which no one outside the door could have had any suspicion. All our talk went on in a whisper, and if we laughed, it was in the quietest way possible, so that I am perfectly certain that Miss Power must have been

listening at the key-hole on that unlucky night when she came in and caught us talking before we had the least idea there was anyone in the room. Oh, how I do dislike people who listen at doors, and who wear shoes that make no noise to let you know they're coming.

We hadn't the faintest idea that the door had opened, or that there was anyone near our beds, when suddenly we heard her voice. How we jumped, Laura and I; we almost died of fright; in fact, I am sure it is most dangerous to go about quietly in the dark like that, and frighten people out of their wits. Well, she preached us quite a sermon all about obedience and disobedience: we couldn't see her face, because it was pitch dark, but her voice was just the same as usual—quiet, low, and horribly determined. She said we ought to be ashamed of ourselves; we were nearly the oldest in the school, and yet we were continually setting examples of disobe-

dience, and teaching the younger ones to set the rules at defiance. Such a state of things could not be allowed, and we should both have a long lesson to learn in our playtime the next day as a punishment, and then perhaps we should not think it quite so much fun to break rules in future.

I don't know how Laura felt, for after this we neither of us ventured to speak ; though Miss Power seemed to go out of the room, I don't think we either of us felt quite certain whether she had not vanished under the bed, and might not reappear if we had even exclaimed, as we were longing to do, "What a shame !"

So we lay still, and for my part I know that I felt very hot and angry, just as I used to feel when Aunt Sophia taught me : evidently Miss Power was just like her, and consequently there could be little doubt, I thought, that she would not be able to manage me. She might give me lessons to learn, I

said to myself, but she might not find it so easy to make me learn them.

It was a long time before I fell asleep ; I was too hot and uncomfortable ; for after I had left off feeling angry and cross I began to feel very miserable, and to wish all sorts of things would happen that couldn't possibly be. First, I wished that I had been born a little black child in one of those countries where there are no schools, so that I might never have been obliged to learn anything ; then, considering that black children are not very pretty, I changed my mind, and thought I would rather have been born one of those poor children who run about London streets, and who, my Aunt had told me, did not even know their letters. Such a state of things would be delightful, it seemed to me, if it had not been for certain story-books which I was rather fond of, and which I should have been sorry not to be able to read. In fact, thinking of these books made me come to

the conclusion that, having already learnt to read, I would rather not change my lot in life with those who had not. It was the things I had still to learn that I now fervently wished to avoid—French, music, and all the difficult things that could not be mastered without so much trouble. If I could only be born over again, I would certainly choose to be one of those children whose parents did not wish them to learn anything that worried them. I tried hard to make up my mind in what sort of a house such children would live; for on this point I was rather particular, and even to escape learning French verbs and my scales, I could not have willingly made up my mind to live in a little house behind a shop, or in a dirty little street, such as some we passed through when we went into the town with Miss Careless.

Perhaps, after all, it might have been better if I had been born a princess, or something of that kind, for though I suppose the Queen

likes her children to learn French and music, of course their governesses would never venture to scold them or give them long lessons to learn, and so I suppose they could do much as they liked. Yes, on the whole, I decided that if I could only be born over again, and if I could choose whose child I would be, I would never choose to belong to Uncle Fred and Aunt Sophia, but to some king or queen, who would live in a grand palace, and let me have a new doll as often as I liked, and a new frock whenever I tore my old one.

Having come to this conclusion I fell asleep, and dreamed of some of the pleasant things I had been thinking about; which made it seem very tiresome to wake up and find that I was still only a little girl at Mrs. Comfort's school, and, what was the worst part of it, a little girl in disgrace, and burdened with an extra lesson to learn.

What a tiresome long lesson that was, I could never make you understand. I often

wonder why lessons which are given as punishments are so much more difficult to learn than any others; but I am quite sure they are, though they come out of the same books as the other lessons, and are not always much longer.

But that lesson was. It was a long, long piece of a French verb, and though I said it to Miss Power at the least six times over, I did not manage to learn it till the hour for our playtime had quite come to an end. It was very provoking, and Laura was longer still; but we felt rather glad to think how it must have worried Miss Power to have to hear us so many times. We did dislike her so very much that morning.

We quite finished making up our minds that day, that we must and would make her go; we would not rest till she had packed her boxes and departed; and as we ran down the garden when at last we got out of the schoolroom, we resolved to make our plans forthwith.

The little ones crowded around us, eager to know if we had learnt our lessons, and if Miss Power had been very cross about it.

"Oh, horridly cross," Laura replied. "She never spoke one word; but if I stopped for a minute just to think what came next, she gave me the book back to learn it all over again."

"And, Maggie, how did you get on," inquired Fanny, as much, if not more excited than any of us.

"Oh, never mind that," I replied, by no means anxious to revive the unpleasant subject; "let's think how we can manage to make her go."

A long silence followed this remark. I think we all felt that this would not be easy.

"Shall we ask Mrs. Comfort to send her away?" suggested one of the youngest of my schoolfellows, "or shall we go and tell her we don't like her our own selves."

"That would be of no use at all; she

won't do anything we ask her, you may be sure of that," Laura replied.

"Then what shall we do?" said Fanny. "If she wasn't quite so tall, or quite so straight——"

"Or quite so grave, and if she hadn't such large brown eyes," I added, "she wouldn't be quite so disagreeable."

"Yes, *I* think governesses ought to be short," remarked the small child who had spoken before, and who evidently thought her opinion well worth having. "I'm never afraid of short people, and I don't like to feel afraid, I don't."

"Nobody does, Georgie," said Fanny, laughing. "But you must get over that; she can't eat you, you know."

"Oh, I know that; she won't hurt me, I'm not afraid of that; but there's something about her that makes me shake all over if I don't know my lessons."

"Never mind your lessons; don't think so



“I always thought that governesses ought to be short.”

much about them, or it will spoil all the fun of being at school. I don't mean to learn my lessons to please anybody, and if Miss Power is anxious to have pupils that are industrious, she had better go somewhere else as soon as possible."

"Oh, if she only would!" sighed several of the children.

"We will make her," Laura and Kate exclaimed; but though we talked grandly, and tried to persuade ourselves that it would be quite possible for us so to worry our governess that she would depart, I don't think any one of us really thought it would be as easy as we pretended.

"It is a good thing we shall have Nelly to help us," Kate said to me as we walked towards the house. And now I must tell you, that having been away for some time at her own home, our little friend, we were told, was shortly to rejoin us. She had not yet seen much of our new governess, and very

eager we all were to hear what her opinion would be. To tell the truth, I was very much afraid that her illness might have taken all the spirit, as I called it, out of Nelly; the story-books I had read had given me the idea that accidents and illnesses always left children very quiet and sober, and so perfectly good that I had some forebodings that Nelly might be inclined to look down on us as too silly and naughty to be tolerated.

If such should really be the case, it would be dangerous in the extreme to confide our schemes to Nelly, who would, if shocked by them, be certain to reveal them all to our governess. On the whole, therefore, having duly consulted Laura, Kate, and Fanny, I judged it best not to admit my little friend fully into our confidence till we had had time to determine whether or not she was changed from the mischief-loving child we had known her.

Miss Power had been with us for about

three weeks when Nelly's return was expected; and the first long quarter of my school life was not very far from a conclusion when she was again among us.

"How stupid of you to come back when the holidays are so near," was the greeting of Fanny French when our little friend was again seated in her accustomed place in the school-room. Nelly had never known that room under the strict rule of Miss Power; so she looked around her with a smile, and seemed well pleased to be there again. Ah, she would not look so contented in a few days, when she had found out that no chattering was allowed in lesson time, and that we elder ones were expected to speak French if we wanted to speak at all. However good her illness might have made her, it could hardly have changed her sufficiently to make her think it nice to speak French. I thought I knew Nelly well enough to be quite sure that she could never like that, though she did look so thin, and pale, and

demure, that for the first half-hour after she came into the house I was seriously alarmed lest my worst fears might prove true.

It seemed a very long time that afternoon before the five o'clock bell set us free from the schoolroom routine to scamper about the garden, and revive the spirits which a too close application to study had depressed to their lowest ebb. Then Kate Clowes and I took solemn possession of Nelly, and walking round and round the garden paths together, we three gravely and earnestly discussed the contrast between things past and things present.

At first of course, as in duty bound, we made all kinds of polite inquiries about the injured arm, and what Nelly had been doing during her visit at home, but that subject was soon exhausted, and we were longing yet half afraid to enter upon the more interesting one of our proceedings, when our little schoolfellow opened the conversation by exclaiming, "Oh, Maggie, it isn't half as nice here as it used

to be, I'm sure. What is that Miss Power like? She looks so horribly strict and solemn; I never saw anyone so unlike dear Miss Careless. Do tell me all about her; I am longing to hear."

Kate and I looked at each other, and this glance seemed to say, "It's all right, we needn't be afraid;" and thus mutually reassured, we ventured cautiously at first, but more boldly as we proceeded, to relate the history of our wrongs.

"She won't let us talk after we go to bed; think of that, Nelly," began Kate.

"And if we do, she gives us long lessons to learn," I added.

"As a punishment, you know," put in Kate.

"Because she calls it breaking rules," I further explained.

"Mamma doesn't like us to talk after we go to bed," said Nelly thoughtfully; "I do wonder what harm it can possibly do. If we talked

secrets there would be nobody to hear us: the bedsteads couldn't."

"It's a whim," said Kate positively; "grown-up people have so many whims."

"Well, but about lessons, isn't she very particular?—dreadfully particular, I mean," inquired Nelly anxiously.

"Oh, lessons! yes, it's horrible; there's no pleasing her; it is of no use at all to cry," said Kate with a groan, and then we all looked very dismal.

Nelly looked very mournful—quite as sad as her face ever could look—as sad as she did when her bird died; and no wonder, for to come back to school and find everything so changed must have been dismal indeed.

"And do you really have to ask for everything in French? And do you never stop and have nice talks to rest you in the middle of your lessons? And does Miss Power never tell the funny stories that Miss Careless used to make us laugh with?"

"No, never—never!" we all exclaimed.

"How horrible! how dull!" said Nelly;
"how can you bear it?"

"We don't mean to bear it," I replied, feeling quite certain from her manner that our secret would be as safe with Nelly as with ourselves. "We don't mean to bear it—that would be quite impossible; we mean to make her so uncomfortable that she will get tired of being here, and go. What do you think of that, Nelly?" I added, triumphantly.

Nelly looked astonished. "It would be splendid if we could," she replied, rather doubtfully. Evidently something made her uncertain of the possibility of our scheme, though what it could be we were puzzled to imagine.

"*If*, Nelly!" Laura exclaimed. "Why, only think, if we won't learn our lessons, if we laugh when she scolds, and mind nothing she says, she must get tired of it and go; I am sure I should."

"Yes," said Nelly, thoughtfully, "so should I, but perhaps she won't; if she thinks we want her to go, perhaps she'll stay just to tease us."

This was a new idea to us, and by no means a pleasant one. It might be the case, certainly, but we could hardly believe it.

"At all events we will try," I replied. I could not deny that the attempts we had already made had not hitherto had much effect, but if we persevered, who could tell what might yet be done. The song says, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again;" and that was exactly what we meant to do.

"See what you think to-morrow, Nelly," I said, as the tea bell compelled us to drop the discussion of our grievances for the present; "if you don't detest her, and long to get rid of her, I shall be very much surprised."

"I do detest her now," Nelly whispered, as Miss Pòwer, seeing us enter the house in a

very leisurely fashion, bade us be quick, and get ready for tea. She had a short, quick way of speaking, which we all disliked excessively. Miss Careless used to put her arm round us so pleasantly when she wanted us to do anything, and never dreamt of ordering us to do things in the way Miss Power did. As Nelly said, she might at least have said "please" if she wanted us to do anything, but she never seemed to think of such a thing.

To be spoken to in that way always made me feel inclined to say I wouldn't do as I was told, and though I didn't say it, I thought it then, and made up my mind I wouldn't hurry myself in the least. And I didn't: I walked upstairs quite slowly, as if I was terribly tired, and I believe that made Miss Power very angry; for when I came downstairs just as the second tea bell rang—for I wasn't late, though I know she hoped I should be—she looked graver, and taller, and browner than ever.

It was extremely provoking that we could not talk in bed that night, though it was the very first night of Nelly's return, and we had so much to say, and so little time to say it—only our playtime and walks; it really was too bad.

I think it made Nelly feel quite cross, and then having to get up so early made her feel worse; for Miss Power would not give up making a fuss about our coming down to do an hour's lessons before breakfast, though we fought and fought about it, and got scolded every day for being late.

I don't think Miss Power's mamma could ever have taught her when she was a little girl that people can't always have their own way; she always seemed so determined to have hers, which of course often made her very unkind to us—at least so I thought then.

But that morning after Nelly's return to school was the worst of all. People never seem to think that grown-up people can ever get up on the wrong side of their beds, but

I am sure they do; and sometimes we used to think that the reason why Miss Power was so cross was, that her bed stood so that she couldn't possibly get out on the right side if she tried ever so hard, because the right side was against the wall ; but then it was just the same when Miss Careless had it, and it did not seem to make her cross. Perhaps she got out at the end, which might make it all right. If so, I only wish Miss Power had thought of doing the same thing.

But if she felt cross that morning, I know we all felt cross too. It is so disagreeable when you have got up too late, and dressed in a tremendous hurry, to be scolded as if you had done something very bad, for it can't—you know it can't—be anyone's fault, and so nobody ought to be blamed. Bates called us properly, and begged us to get up, and of course we all meant to do so, only we went to sleep again for just one minute ; there was no harm in that, and then we did not wake again

till it was later than we intended. That wasn't our fault, and if Miss Power had not been very fond of scolding, she would have taken it all as good-temperedly as Miss Careless always did.

But we were all used to it by this time, and expected to be scolded when we were late; but we did think it very unkind of her to find fault with poor Nelly the very first day after she came back; but that was just like her, too—she never made any difference between the girls, so that we could not say anyone was her favourite, which was a pity, because her favourites, if she had had any, might have been useful in getting some of their companions out of scrapes.

CHAPTER V.

THE FLOWER-SHOW.

IF you can give a good account of them this afternoon, I shall be very glad to let them go."

These words passed between Mrs. Comfort and Miss Power just outside the school-room door one morning shortly after Nelly's return; and we, who though we seemed to be learning our geography, had our ears wide open to hear anything that might be interesting, looked at one another and wondered what it meant. Something was going to happen, that was plain, but what could it be? We felt deeply injured that Mrs. Comfort had told us nothing about it; if some expedition had been planned, and Miss Power knew

all about it, surely we ought to have been told.

How we wished that we had heard the first part of the conversation between Mrs. Comfort and Miss Power, instead of merely that little bit at the end which had so excited our curiosity; and oh! how we wished for the hundredth time that dear Miss Careless was still our governess, for had she been told a piece of news of any interest to us, we should have been certain to hear it in less than five minutes; but Miss Power was so different. To see her walk into the school-room staid and quiet, with not even a sparkle in her eyes, or the faintest possible smile on her face, you would never have guessed that she had heard any news at all, and as to guessing what it was from anything she said, why, that was simply impossible. Some people's faces seem to tell you everything almost without their speaking a word, but Miss Power's was always the same: if she

was unhappy, or tired, or cross, her face was grave and solemn; and if she was merry, or glad, or pleased, why, it looked just the same—not one bit different.

So as it was of no use to stare at her, we took up our books and went on with our lessons, but if she had only known how many of our thoughts were entirely occupied with those few words of Mrs. Comfort's, I think even *she* would have told us; for how could we possibly learn our lessons when we had something so much more interesting to think about?

Some of us, I suppose, remembering the first part of that sentence, "If you can give a good account of them," did try very hard to learn our lessons perfectly, and after some time it came into my head that I had better try too; for though I was very anxious to lose no opportunity of tormenting Miss Power, to do so at the risk of losing some treat was not at all what I was inclined to do. Nelly and

Kate looked at me, and seeing me take up my book and begin to learn very industriously, they made up their minds in a few minutes to follow my example. "We shall all go," I thought to myself; "Miss Power won't be able to complain of us to-day, though I daresay she would like to get us into disgrace very much indeed." But I was mistaken, as you will see.

The lessons went on as usual, and when the twelve o'clock bell rang, Mrs. Comfort came into the school-room with such a smiling face that we knew at once that she had something pleasant to say. In fact, we might be sure of that without looking at her face, for Mrs. Comfort did not like saying disagreeable things, and very seldom came into the school-room when anything unpleasant was going on.

So we all looked up with eager faces to hear what she had to say, and Miss Power, seeing that some of the children were getting up to put their books away, bade them sit

still and be quiet, that they might hear what Mrs. Comfort had to tell them. The old lady looked round with her most beaming face ; sometimes her face quite shone, just as mine does when I wash it with a great deal of soap ; and that was how her face looked as she glanced round the school-room, and then turning to Miss Power, said, " When I have told them of the invitation I have had, you will tell me who has earned the treat, and who I may have the pleasure of taking with me this afternoon."

Then looking at us, she went on : " Lady Owen has been so kind as to invite all of you to go to her flower-show this afternoon. It will be very warm, I am afraid, but as I always like to give you any pleasure in my power, I will take you all if Miss Power gives you a good character, and says that you have worked industriously this morning." She paused, and naturally enough we all looked at Miss Power to see what she would say.

Mrs. Comfort looked at her too, and after waiting a minute as if expecting her to speak, she inquired, with a look of anxiety coming over her bright face, "I hope they have none of them forfeited the treat, Miss Power?"

Then at last Miss Power spoke, in the low, determined way she always did, and for once in our lives we listened most attentively to what she said.

"They have all worked pretty well this morning," was her answer, "except Dolly Davies; she has done nothing, so she cannot go, Mrs. Comfort."

"Dolly Davies, I am sorry," said the kind old lady, looking regretfully at the little figure that sat at the end of the table. Miss Power's eyes were fixed on her, and I remember thinking that if I were Dolly, I should not at all like to have to sit and be stared at by all the girls, and the governess and Mrs. Comfort too.

For we did stare at poor Dolly most unmercifully; I really don't know why, because she had done nothing very extraordinary, only what we did every day, and what we had all along determined we would do. I suppose we looked at her to see how she would like having to stay at home all by herself, while we went to the flower-show; for Dolly's face was not like Miss Power's, it was not always the same, whether she was happy or unhappy, good or naughty; and just now, as I looked at her, I thought I could tell quite well what she was thinking about.

I thought she was saying to herself that she didn't care—I could see her lips move as if she said it; but I remembered that sometimes when I had said to myself that I didn't care, it was quite a mistake, and I did care very much indeed.

I thought this in the pause that followed Mrs. Comfort's little speech, for nobody

spoke for some time, and none of us stirred till Miss Power told us to put our books away. Then Mrs. Comfort bade us remember that we must have nice clean frocks on, and be neat and tidy to start with her soon after dinner. We were very glad to be at liberty to run away and chatter, as we always did when our tongues were free to speak our native language. It was too hot for a walk, so, grouped together under the shade of the old trees in the garden, we talked of the morning's events, and pitied Dolly to our heart's content.

"But where is she?" exclaimed Laura, looking round after the first outburst of exclamations had subsided. "What has become of her, poor girl!"

"There she is," replied Kate, pointing to one of our companions who was at that moment leaving the house, wearing a most forlorn aspect, and evidently rather reluctant to be noticed.

"Dolly, come here," exclaimed two or three of us at once. We were longing to see what she would say, but we had very little pity for any embarrassment she might feel. "Come here, Dolly; don't be silly and run away; what a cross old thing Miss Power is, isn't she?"

"Yes; but we knew that long ago," said Dolly, rather reluctantly, biting a bit of grass which she had picked up on her way from the house, and keeping her face averted while she spoke.

"Yes; but I never fancied she would have ventured to do such a thing as this," I answered, feeling certain that from her way of speaking, Miss Power was not the only object of Dolly Davies' resentment just then.

"Ventured!" repeated Dolly, contemptuously; "why, she saw that she could do what she liked with all of you, so of course she would venture to do what she liked with me."

“Do what she liked with us !—what do you mean ?” Nelly and I inquired in one breath ; “how could she see anything of the kind.”

“Why, didn’t you hear them say that unless you did your lessons properly, you wouldn’t be allowed to go to this wonderful flower-show ? For my part I hate flower-shows, and I can’t think why you wanted to go to it ; but I suppose you did, or you wouldn’t have taken such pains to learn your lessons like good little girls in story-books.”

We were struck dumb by this attack, which we certainly never expected from meek, careless Dolly, and, to tell the truth, we were quite at a loss how to answer it ; for now it was beginning to be plain to most of our minds that, in our anxiety not to lose our treat, we had quite forgotten the agreement we had made among ourselves—never, without giving her all the trouble in our power, to learn any lesson she set us.

As none of us spoke, Dolly looked up with

a gleam of satisfaction in her hitherto sulky face, and glancing at our discomfited looks, remarked, "It seems you have quite forgotten what you persuaded me to promise, Maggie ; so I suppose I may forget it, if I choose, next time there is any nice little plan proposed, but I hope it will be something better than a trumpery flower-show ; I shouldn't care to break my word for such a thing as that."

"You needn't be rude, Dolly," said Kate, recovering herself more quickly than I could ; "everybody has a right to change their minds if they like ; but to tell the truth, I quite forgot about our promise then, and I wish you had too, and then you would have been going to the flower-show with us all right and comfortably this afternoon. I hate to think you are to be left at home."

"Oh, pray don't trouble yourself in the least about it," replied Dolly, haughtily tossing her head ; "I shall be perfectly happy at

home ; I don't at all mind learning my lessons when I have a quiet room to do them in ;" and she turned away and left us.

"She does mind very much for all that," I remarked, after she had disappeared ; "I know she'd got a big lump in her throat, and wanted to cry ever so badly ; and really, Kate, I am afraid we have treated her rather cruelly."

"It was her own fault," Kate replied ; "when she saw us all learning our lessons, why didn't she do so too?—she might have seen that we'd changed our minds."

"If we had all kept our promises, and not learnt our lessons, I wonder what Miss Power would have done ; she couldn't have kept us all at home," Nelly said, thoughtfully ; "Mrs. Comfort would have been so put out, because she wouldn't have known what to say to Lady Owen, you see."

"Miss Power wouldn't have cared a straw for that," Laura replied.

"Then you think she would have kept us all at home?" I inquired.

"Yes; I am sure of it," said Laura.

"No; I don't think so," said Kate.

"No; more do I," replied several of the others.

"I almost wish we'd tried," I said, and, to tell the truth, I felt ashamed to think that Dolly was the only one of us who had remained true to our compact, and as I thought of this, I made up my mind that in future no promised pleasure should make me less faithful than Dolly had been.

I suppose Nelly had some such idea herself, for, before anyone else spoke, she broke forth rather vehemently, "I tell you what, I do believe she would have kept us at home if we had given her the least excuse, for really she looked quite sorry to think we were going. How I do dislike her! and how I do wish we could torment her so that she would make up her mind to go."

"We have lost one chance of teasing her to-day," said Kate, regretfully; "but we must think of some plans. Come, remember she has been here a month now—that is much too long a time."

"We might imitate everything she does," suggested Laura. "I know that it makes me so angry, I can hardly bear myself when anyone imitates me."

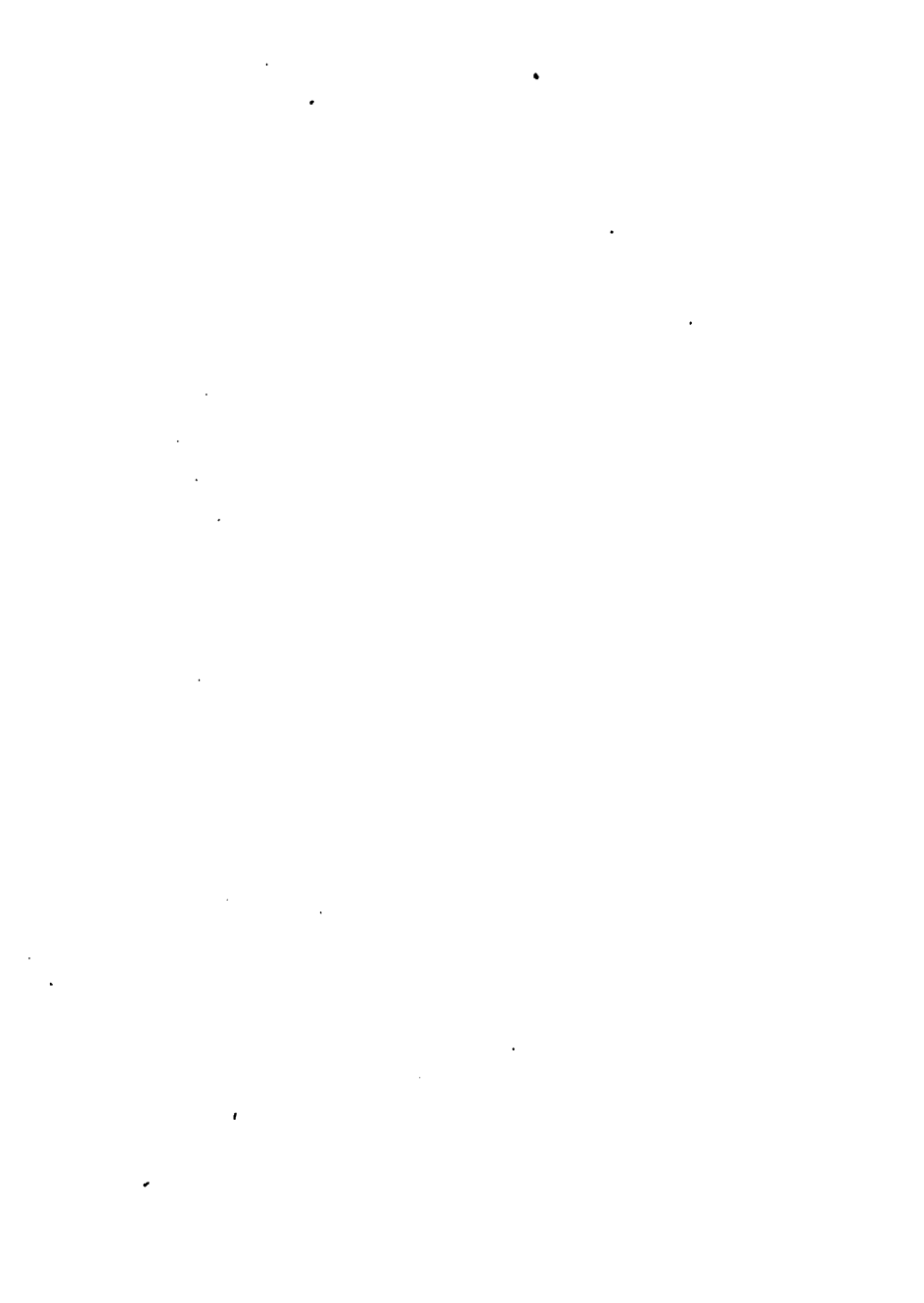
"Yes, it is horrid, I know it quite well," I replied; "that is a good idea, Laura; suppose we all try and walk like she does, as straight and stiff as pokers."

"If we had only long hair we might fasten it up in the funny way she does," suggested Louey Fisk, who was always regretting that her hair was so short that it could only be curled, which was a pity, as of course it made her look such a child.

"Or we might sneeze whenever she sneezes, or cough whenever she coughs; that will be splendid!" I cried, vehemently. "She has a



"Now, remember, if she coughs we will cough too."



cough just now. Now, remember, if she coughs we will all cough too ; oh, how cross she will be !”

There could be little doubt of that, we all thought ; and the expectation of seeing her quiet face look angry, and her large eyes flash, was very delightful to us then — I often wonder why now.

Well, we went to the flower-show all dressed in our best. I wonder whether I ought to put down in my book what we all wore ; it would be a great deal of trouble, and as the frocks are nearly all worn out by this, I don't think it can signify, because frocks are not like people, who have their lives written when they are dead. I shouldn't like my frocks to have their lives written, because they must know a great deal about my sayings and doings, which everybody doesn't need to know. I daresay it was what people call a “ great event ” to my frock to go to the flower-show ; but, now I come to

think about it, it heard a great many things said which would not look at all pretty if they were written down in a book ; for we talked a great deal about Miss Power, because, you see, she did not go with us, and so there was no fear of her overhearing us.

I don't know why she didn't go : Mrs. Comfort asked her, but she declined, and the kind old lady said she supposed she did not like to leave Dolly at home by herself. Laura said she believed she stayed at home to see that Dolly did her lessons properly ; if so, she succeeded, for when we came home we found Dolly sitting on the garden-bench playing with the cat, having learnt her lessons and said them an age ago, as she said. There was a funny look in Dolly's face as she said this, which I didn't understand then ; but before long I found out what it meant. In fact it was not many days before she told me all about that afternoon, how she wouldn't learn her lessons at first, how Miss Power talked

to her, and how she saw then that it was stupid not to learn them and be happy. And so she set to work and learnt them, as she said, in less than no time ; but that couldn't be true, because, you know, even one word of spelling must take some time to learn, and besides, I don't believe there can be such a thing as no time. I am afraid Dolly was not particular enough about speaking the truth ; but to go on with my story. She said she was quite happy when she'd done her lessons, and so she had made up her mind when she was sitting on the garden-seat playing with the cat, that in future she would always learn her lessons whether we liked it or not ; she thought it was silly to pretend we couldn't do such easy things, for nobody could possibly believe us.

I got very angry when she said that, and told her she was a traitor, like that man who wrote that silly letter about the Gunpowder Plot, and betrayed all his friends ; but Dolly

only laughed, and said she would rather have been that man than Guy Fawkes, who must have looked so foolish when he was caught among all his powder and stuff.

But laughing did not make the matter any better, in fact it made it worse, for it made me more and more angry ; and I could not help saying that if Dolly persisted in breaking her promise to us, I should tell all the girls what I thought of her, and I hoped with all my heart that they would treat her as she deserved, and not speak to her as long as she made herself so disagreeable.

But Dolly only laughed at me, and said she was not afraid ; for no one could say that she had been the first to break that promise, and even if she had been, she should not care, for she thought if people made promises that were stupid and wrong, they would be very stupid and wicked to keep them.

Of course it was of no use to talk to Dolly if she would say such silly things as

that, so I ran away and left her, and went to tell Nelly and Kate, and all of them, that they must be careful what they said to Dolly now, as she had turned traitor, and if we were not on our guard, she would go and tell Miss Power all our plans beforehand, and spoil all our fun.

"It is a good thing she didn't hear what we settled to do about imitating the cross old thing," Kate remarked, when I fully made them understand how badly Dolly was behaving; "oh! I do long to see how she will look when we try it. Now, Maggie, don't let's forget; I do hope the little ones will remember, and not be behindhand—that would spoil it all."

"So it would; but never mind Miss Power," exclaimed Laura, impatiently; "I am getting so tired of her—we never talk of anything else now. Come and see my rabbits."

So we marched off to the little shed where these unfortunate rabbits of Laura's were

kept shut up in a box with a few holes in the top. They weren't much to look at, certainly, but we did not like to tell Laura so, for fear she might be hurt. Behind her back all laughed at them, and had strong suspicions that the rabbits must hate her, and consider her as their natural enemy. For though we had—that is, Nelly and I had—lived the greater part of our lives in a town, we had some ideas about the nature of animals, and pitied these poor creatures extremely for their melancholy mode of existence.

“I should think they must wish they were dead and baked in a pie,” Nelly whispered to me, as we watched Laura pull out first one and then the other by its ear, stroke and fondle it, and call it “a beauty;” and then, having as she thought done her duty by them, put them back into the box, throw in some leaves, and run away in search of some other amusement.

I was not quite inclined to agree with

Nelly; frightful as I thought the rabbit's fate, to be made into a pie might be a trifle worse; it would be so hard, I thought, to be eaten by the person who had fondled and kissed them, and Laura, as I well knew, was very fond of rabbit-pie, and would not have the smallest objection to devour her beauties when the right time came. This was a thing I never could quite like in Laura, and when she kissed me and told me, as she did sometimes, that she loved me better than any other girl in the world, I used to wonder whether, supposing it was the fashion to make little girls into pies as well as rabbits, Laura would be as ready to eat me as she was her pets. For she often talked about having them killed, as if they had no more feeling than dolls; and sometimes she felt them to see if they were fat, which seemed to me rather rude and unfeeling, for I never heard that rabbits are deaf, and I don't believe they are.

But Laura never would believe that they cared. She would shut them in their box, which was almost dark, and say it didn't signify, and she would forget for days together to take them anything nice to eat, and think it was of no consequence; and it was of no use at all to talk to her—she always said she had kept rabbits for a long time, and she knew they did not care.

And so the poor rabbits lived on in their miserable house, and I must say they bore their troubles very well, for they never tried to bite Laura when she took them up, or got into a passion, as I should have done if I had been they. For you see if they didn't mind being half-starved themselves, it must have been awkward for them to have so little food for their children, especially as they always had a great many. I think they must have disliked Laura as much as we did Miss Power.

And yet *we* all liked Laura. I do not

know exactly why, I suppose because we were children and not rabbits; it did not much signify to us how she treated her pets, and I don't think we liked her any the less because we laughed at her for a great many funny ways. For she had a great many funny ways, nobody can deny it; and for my part I never could understand why she was always so determined that everything she liked or admired she must have for her own.

If one of us happened to have a new copy-book with a prettier cover than usual, Laura was perfectly miserable if she could not induce the owner to exchange it for one of hers; and with pencils, pens, and everything else it was just the same. It seemed as if she could not bear that anyone should possess anything prettier or more useful than she had; four times during the three months I had now been at school had she changed her garden; and as for the different pets that the girls possessed, there was scarcely one that

Laura had not at one time or other bought of its owner and then sold again.

As she had always plenty of pocket-money, and never refused to pay high prices to gratify her desires, we were not likely to object greatly to this peculiarity of hers, though of course we often laughed at her, and wondered that she did not break her heart that she could not buy the world or something equally absurd; but Laura was very good-natured, and did not mind being laughed at, and that I suppose was the reason why we liked her so much.

CHAPTER VI.

OUR PLOT.

I ALWAYS used to think I should like to be a queen, yes, as long as I can remember, even in the days when I used to look at the picture-book at the picture of the Queen, with the crown on her head, and a ball in one hand and a long stick in the other; I have always felt unhappy when I have remembered that though there is a Queen of England it isn't Maggie Marston, but somebody whom I know nothing about, and who perhaps doesn't care at all about being queen, and thinks it rather a trouble.

Once I remember I told Davis—Aunt Sophia's maid—how much I wished I could be a queen; and she looked quite frightened,

as if she thought I had said something very dreadful, and when I laughed at her grave face, she said very solemnly, "Miss Maggie, take care what you say, and take care what you wish; there's been many a one as would gladly have got rid of their crowns, I'll be bound."

"Then I wish they'd give them to me," I had replied; "not that I'd care about the crown itself, it's what goes along with it: having lots of servants, and lots of soldiers and sailors, and all kinds of people who do just what the Queen tells them—that's what I should like. The money and the fine clothes I should not care about in the least; it is the ruling and governing I should like."

That's what I said to Davies, and though she was very shocked, and called it ambition and all sorts of names, I kept the same feeling a long while, and often after I went to school I used to play games by myself in bed at night, and I always made believe I was a

queen. Sometimes these games made me very unhappy, for I used to think how different everything would have been if I had only been a real queen or princess, and not a make-believe; but still I went on with them, though they did make me sad.

But one night, just about the time of that flower-show, a new idea came into my head. I had always thought that I was born to be a queen, and sometimes fancied that some day or other it would come to pass, though how that could be I had no idea; but now I thought to myself the girls would make such a fuss with me, and think so much of my opinion, that they must feel something the same; they always look at me to see what they are to do and say; yes, it is quite plain they think a great deal of me.

Now this is a part of my story that I don't much like to write down, for a great many reasons, but chiefly because it makes me feel so uncomfortable to do it; my face gets red

as I write it; but it didn't seem quite right to leave it out, and so in it goes; and I hope that most people will think this part of my book dry and stupid, and leave it out.

It was just at this time, when I was beginning to consider myself quite a wonderful personage, and certainly the leader of our plot against Miss Power, that she—I mean our governess—caught a bad cold. Hearing her coughing and sneezing reminded me of the grand scheme we had concocted in the garden the evening after that business of Dolly and the flower-show.

I looked round the schoolroom; it was in the afternoon, and most of the girls were sitting quietly learning their lessons for the next day, when this thought jumped into my head. Many of them were looking at their books, and I could not easily catch their eyes, but after a good deal of nudging of the girl who was next to me, and signs to those opposite, I succeeded in making myself under-

stood. Just as I had done so, and thoroughly attracted all their attention, a sudden sneeze from Miss Power gave me exactly the opportunity I had been longing for, and without a moment's thought I imitated it to the very best of my ability. Instantly sneeze followed sneeze; some of the echoes, I must own, proving very bad attempts, for the little ones seemed chiefly desirous to make as much noise as ever they could; but it was hardly possible for anyone to doubt what they meant, and I could not help taking a stealthy glance out of the corners of my eyes to ascertain what Miss Power thought of it.

She could hardly have failed to understand it, I thought; and if so, she must be strange indeed if she was not angry. So I thought, and even now I cannot understand it, for I am quite, *quite* sure that if anyone had treated me in that way, I should have been quite furious.

But she! she didn't look in the least bit angry; her face was as pale as usual, and quite

as quiet. She first gave a look round the room, as much as to say, "Certainly the schoolroom is draughty" (but then it was the month of June), and then went on with what she was doing as if nothing at all had happened.

You may imagine how angry we felt, especially I, who had set the example; but one thing consoled us all: if Miss Power had not noticed our performance, one person had, and that was Dolly Davies, the only one who had not sneezed, and she sat looking more angry than I had ever seen her. Really it seemed as if the silly child had fallen in love with Miss Power first because she had punished her.

"Some people say, Dogs love best those who beat them most," Nelly remarked when we were talking about Dolly, soon after lessons were over; "if so, Dolly must be very like a dog, for Miss Power has been crosser to her than anybody."



Certainly the schoolroom was draughty.



"She has never been cross to me," said a low voice close behind us, and, turning round, we saw Dolly herself. We had been standing near the window in the large play-room, and she had come in without our seeing her. Her face was flushed, as it had been in the schoolroom, and she was twisting the end of her brown holland apron in a nervous, excited way.

"Listeners never hear any good of themselves, Dolly," I said; for I was vexed that she had overheard what we had been saying, and I knew that she was angry with us.

"I wasn't listening, but I couldn't help hearing," was Dolly's answer; "and you didn't say any harm of me, that I know of: I don't mind being like a dog; dogs are very nice creatures. It was Miss Power you were abusing, as you always are."

"How has she bewitched you, Dolly?" asked Nelly, suddenly; "you didn't like her any better than the rest of us when she first

came ; and I don't see what she's done that you should change your mind."

"I didn't say I had," Dolly replied, still twisting the corner of her apron. "Perhaps I don't like her, and perhaps I do ; I haven't made up my mind yet. But she hasn't been cross to me, nor to any of us, and so it's of no use pretending she has."

"Oh, you say that because she does not get into a fury and turn scarlet like some people do when they're angry ; but there are other ways of being cross, and Miss Power knows all about them."

"You say that because she looks grave and doesn't smile," Dolly replied ; "but I don't see why you should say people are cross because they don't smile. Now I should like to know when you've ever heard Miss Power *say* anything cross—I know I haven't."

"Wasn't she cross when she kept you at home from the flower-show ?" inquired Nelly, with very wide-open eyes.

“No; she was kinder that day than usual. She heard me my lessons quite patiently four times over; and when I said them right at last, she said she was glad I’d tried to be good, and that she knew it wasn’t easy for any of us to turn over a new leaf and be industrious, when we had got into the way of being idle so long.”

“Then you tried to say your lessons four times before you knew them, did you, Miss Dolly?” I exclaimed. “Why, I thought you told us you learnt them as easily as possible!”

“So I did, when I began to try,” Dolly replied, colouring very deeply. “I didn’t begin to try till after I’d said them three times.”

“Did you tell Miss Power *that*, I wonder?” Nelly remarked. “Perhaps she wouldn’t have been so patient with you if you had.”

Dolly made no reply to this inquiry, but glanced up with a sudden quick look at Nelly,

as she said, "Then you have changed your mind, and believe she wasn't cross?"

"Oh, I know nothing about what happened when I was out of the way, and I'm sure I don't care; but I never shall believe that she is not always as cross as two sticks. She looks it."

"And you like it, and you want to make her crosser still," Dolly replied, looking rather mischievous; "that's why you imitated her just now."

"We want to make her hate us all, so that she will go," I exclaimed impatiently; "can't you understand that?"

"You won't succeed," said Dolly, quietly.

"Shan't we?—much you know about the matter!"

"She won't hate you any more than I hate that bothersome fly," said Dolly, making a dart at a fly that had settled three times in an obstinate style on her nose. "You are no more worth hating."

“Really, Dolly, how rude and vulgar you are!” exclaimed Nelly; “the idea of comparing us to flies!”

“Somebody compared me to a dog,” said Dolly, growing very much excited—she never could keep her temper, poor child; “and as to being vulgar, after the way you behaved to-day in the schoolroom, I shouldn’t think you could ever *pretend* to be young ladies again.”

Dolly’s tantrums really seemed to us so intolerable that we were seriously thinking of turning her out of the room, when the door opened, and the tall, erect figure of Miss Power appeared, summoned to the spot, I suppose, by our loud voices.

It was a most disagreeable interruption, just like her, we inwardly voted, to come in and put a stop to an interesting and exciting conversation. Very likely, judging by our flushed faces, she would call it a quarrel, which would be quite a mistake, as we should

never of course think of quarrelling with Dolly Davies, who was nearly a year younger than we were.

How I wished, as I looked at her standing there so calm, quiet, and pale, that my face had not that disagreeable habit of getting red about nothing. She looked at us—a long, inquiring gaze out of those large brown eyes, but she asked no questions. Perhaps she doubted whether she should hear the truth if she did; but I know I wished she would speak, or do anything rather than stand looking like that. As Nelly said afterwards, those eyes seemed as if they looked not at you, but into you—in short, right through your head. That sort of look is not at all pleasant; for though I never can quite make out where one's thoughts are made, whether it is in one's head or in one's soul, I never could help feeling when Miss Power looked at me in that way, as if she were reading all my thoughts, wherever they may be. And that

makes me inclined to think that the head is the place where the thoughts are made, for certainly she always looked as if she could see inside our heads. As for our souls and minds, I can never imagine whereabouts they are ; but I fancy they are somewhere in the side, just where one feels a great thump, thump, after one has been running.

Well, whether Miss Power guessed from our faces, or from what she saw inside our heads, that we had been quarrelling, I am sure I don't know. She didn't say anything, and that was another thing about her that always vexed me ; she never let you know what she was thinking about, never asked questions, or gave you the least idea what she thought of you. No ; all she did was to look at us well, till we all felt very uncomfortable, and I suppose till she had found out all she wanted to know, and then, as Dolly had gone away, she took up a book to make us think she had come in for that,

and went away again as quietly as she had come in.

After that, as you may be quite sure, we talked very quietly and softly, even though we were very angry with Dolly, and felt sure that she would have been very glad if we had got into a scrape.

"We shall have to punish her for her impertinence somehow or other," said Nelly to me when we had made quite sure that we were quite alone, and that no one was listening outside the door. I have heard of such things happening, though I never knew anyone who would do such a thing.

"Yes," I said, in answer to Nelly, "she will hinder all our plans if she goes on like this. To think that anyone would be so silly!"

"Maggie," Nelly exclaimed suddenly, without heeding my last remark, "we mustn't let Dolly fancy that she has made us change our minds; if we have a chance of imitating

Miss Power again this afternoon, don't let's lose it."

"To be sure we won't," I replied; "I will give the signal, and be sure you follow up closely."

"It shouldn't be sneezing again, that would seem stupid," Nelly suggested, and I fully agreed, thinking that if I watched closely, some other idea would be sure to occur to me.

Perhaps you have never been a kind of Guy Fawkes, as I was now beginning to feel myself to be, and so you will not be quite able to understand how very full my head was of our plot and schemes. If I had wished to do my lessons I should have found it very hard now that my schoolfellows were all looking to me to guide them in their proceedings and trusting me so entirely. But as I didn't wish to learn my lessons, all that was of very little consequence; I stumbled through them somehow, losing all my marks

of course, but not caring one bit for that, in fact, being rather proud of it than otherwise. It seems very strange now, when I come to think of it, and I wonder I wasn't more unhappy than I remember to have been.

But to go back to my story of that day. There was no sneezing in the afternoon, but chancing to glance at our governess once, shortly before lessons were over, I spied that she had taken her handkerchief from her pocket, as if she had forgotten altogether the scene of the morning. Instantly, with a great flourish, I pulled forth mine; Nelly, who was sitting next to me, did the same; and in less than a minute, handkerchiefs of all colours and of every shade of colour were waved and flourished in the air.

It was a pity, certainly, that very few of them were exactly white—they would have looked prettier, and have been a better imitation of Miss Power; for I don't think she



Handkerchiefs of all colours.

ever wiped her pen with hers, or even used it to dry a slate.

Perhaps she was thinking it was time some of these handkerchiefs went to the wash, for though she had taken no notice of our sneezing-match in the morning, at this sudden appearance of our handkerchiefs, I noticed that she leaned a little forward and looked at us, as if she wondered what it all meant.

I couldn't make her out; it did seem so very odd that she didn't even turn red then; I should have been crimson. But her face was just the same colour as usual;—oh, it made me quite mad to look at her, for instead of being vexed, as she surely would have been if she had any feelings, she looked almost amused, as if she was thinking to herself, “What silly things! do they really think I mind such tricks as these?”

Perhaps she didn't really think that, but she looked to me as if she did, and Nelly told me afterwards that she thought the same.

Would anything make her scold? I wondered to myself. How I wished that I could think of something, for if she had only spoken in that loud, sharp voice that Bates used when she was angry, Dolly would be able to see how cross she really was.

But she scarcely spoke at all that afternoon; we had lessons to learn, and all that she had to do was to sit in the schoolroom and keep order. But when lessons were over, and we were going upstairs to prepare for tea, she stopped us, and in her usual quiet tone desired us each to fetch clean handkerchiefs, those she had just seen being hardly, she said, such as *young ladies* should use.

We did not much like that. Dolly and she seemed to be of the same opinion, that we were not ladylike in our behaviour, and though of course we did not think much of Miss Power's or Dolly's opinion, to tell the truth we did not like to have such things said to us.

"Are you going to do as she told you, Maggie?" Laura inquired, overtaking me as I went up to our bedroom; "suppose we do nothing of the kind, and bring out the same handkerchiefs at tea-time?"

"And be called unladylike; no, thank you, Laura; I do not approve of that, and I shouldn't think you do, either."

"Well, whether I approve of it or not, I can't help it; for I haven't any clean handkerchiefs left. I used so many at the beginning of the week, trying to rub the wires of my canary's cage bright, that I haven't one left."

"What fun!" I replied; and I wished with all my heart that I could say the same, as at that moment I longed, but dared not, to be disobedient.

CHAPTER VII.

NELLY'S BULLFINCH.

IT was very strange, but in spite of all we did—and I am sure it was a great deal—the holidays came and passed away ; and when we returned to school Miss Power came back too. Up to the very last we had hoped that she would give up, and say she was tired of us, and couldn't manage us ; but she did nothing of the sort ; and when we came back to school after the Midsummer holidays, there she was again, as grave, quiet, and pale as ever.

It really was most aggravating ; and how she could persist in staying where she was not wanted, I can't imagine. Some of us thought she merely did it to tease us ; but I am more

inclined to think that she had never found out how much we disliked her, and so never thought of relieving us of her presence.

Anyhow, we came back, and everything went on just as it had before ; and most of us began to hate school as much as in former days we had liked it. But I was not one of those ; for whatever school might be, it must, at all events, be more lively and cheery than my home was. I had always thought myself an unfortunate child ; and on this occasion, my first holiday time, I had become firmly convinced that I was right, and more than ever jealous of little girls who had papas and mammas, and little brothers and sisters. For oh ! the old house had seemed so dull ; Uncle Fred had been ill, and was more quiet than ever ; and Aunt was so fidgety about him that she would not allow the slightest noise. Then it rained a great many days, and I could seldom go out for a walk, or even to play in the garden, so that I was dull, as some people

say, with a vengeance; why they say so, I haven't the least idea, for vengeance is a wrong and wicked thing, and I know quite well that it was not wicked of me to be dull, because I couldn't help it.

But what is the use of talking about the holidays, which were such a fearfully dull time that I can't bear even to think of them; they came to an end at last; and though Miss Power was there, I was quite glad to come back to Mrs. Comfort's. At first we were so merry and happy, that we forgot all about our schemes and plans. Nelly had brought back a new bird, a bullfinch, that could sing very beautifully, she said, if it only liked; but it never did like, as far as I could find out; and though at first we used to watch it a great deal, and grow very excited whenever it opened its beak, in course of time we came to the conclusion that Nelly had been deceived, and that the bullfinch was an impostor. It was a melancholy conclusion, for Nelly,

as she assured us, had paid a great deal of money in order to get a bird that could sing, and therefore this disappointment was all the more severe. We pitied Nelly very much; and felt that, considering her broken arm and everything, her troubles really were greater than most people's. As Kate was very fond of saying, some people were born to be unlucky; and Nelly was clearly of that number.

But of all the unlucky pets we ever had, this bullfinch was the worst. Laura had kept all kinds of pets—dormice, birds, and rabbits, and most of them had led miserable lives and come to untimely ends. Kate had once smuggled a kitten to school, which she kept imprisoned in a large dark closet where our walking things were put; but after a short period of this miserable confinement, it had made its escape, and had vanished up the chimney, where, as we all firmly believed, it still lived and flourished.

Others of the children had at different times brought various kinds of birds with them to school ; but though we could not often flatter ourselves that they had lived either useful or happy lives, we could at least be pretty sure that they had done nobody any harm. But this unlucky bullfinch's life was by no means so innocent : it got us, and its little mistress especially, into innumerable scrapes ; in fact, its coming to the house was a perfect calamity, as people say ; for, in the first place, for some time after it arrived, in our anxiety to hear it sing, we used frequently to linger round the cage so long that the lesson bell had to be rung two or three times over before half of us were seated in our places. Then Miss Power would look paler and graver than usual ; bad marks were placed against our names, and the lessons which we had badly prepared were doubled, to our extreme wrath and indignation.

But this was not all, or I should never have

thought it worth while to begin writing the history of this tiresome bullfinch, which seems to me nearly as full of blunders and mistakes as my own story is. I wonder whether it had the least idea how much trouble it brought upon us, and whether it was as sorry as it ought to have been.

Well, it was one Saturday morning, just after the twelve o'clock bell rang, that three or four of us were standing round the bullfinch's cage. I don't think we were waiting to hear him sing, because we were quite tired of thinking about that; in fact, I am not sure that we were paying any attention to Bully just then. Nelly was feeding him, I believe, but nobody else was troubling themselves about him, when suddenly there was a great skirmish in the room. How it began I don't know, but I saw Nelly and Kate rushing wildly about after a large cat, who, as I heard afterwards, had made a spring at poor Bully, and had tried to bite him. Of course

they didn't catch the cat, for, having driven her three or four times round the playroom, Mrs. Puss suddenly freed herself from her pursuers by darting through the open window, and climbing a tree, from amidst the boughs of which she looked down in triumph over her disappointed enemies.

In her rage and fright Nelly at first declared she would climb the tree, too, and fetch down that savage cat, who, she was quite determined, must be hanged on the spot; but this we assured her she must not think of attempting: the tree was much too high, she might fall and break her neck, and what then would become of poor Bully?

Hearing this, Nelly, who was much excited, began to cry; her poor Bully, she was quite sure, would be killed some day by that brute of a cat, and how would she be able to prevent it? She had always felt quite certain that must happen; in fact, she believed that it was because Mrs. Comfort

hated her bullfinch, and hoped it would be killed, that she kept that horrid cat.

Now, as I have said before, most of us liked Mrs. Comfort very much, so when we heard Nelly say this, we could not help thinking she was rather unjust. I remember seeing Dolly Davies, who was in the room, flush and look angry, just as she had done when Nelly and I were talking about Miss Power. However, nobody said anything, for we all knew that Nelly was very unhappy just then, and couldn't stop to think what she was saying.

But as she cried and sobbed very hard, we felt as if we ought to do something to comfort her, and as Kate said nothing, and Laura looked quite puzzled, I thought I really must begin ; so I put my arm round Nelly and said, "Never mind, Nelly dear, that horrid cat must be killed : we will ask Mrs. Comfort to have it hanged directly, and of course she can't refuse

when she hears what it did, or very nearly did."

"No, of course not," Kate added, and Laura continued decisively, "Why, a cat costs nothing; anybody will give you a cat; but your bullfinch cost ever so many shillings; you know, Nelly."

"Let's go and ask Mrs. Comfort to tell the gardener to hang the cat," I said; "Nelly will be afraid to leave her bird while that horrid creature is prowling about."

Kate agreed, and so she and I and Laura at once went to make our request of Mrs. Comfort, quite certain that she would grant it immediately; but, to our surprise, the old lady only laughed and looked at us over the tops of her spectacles, as much as to say, "What funny children you are!" At first she seemed to think we were in fun, and wondered why we should think of coming to play with her as if she were a child too; but when she found out that we were in earnest,

and really wanted the cat to be killed, she looked quite different, and almost cross.

I don't remember exactly what she said, something about our being impertinent to ask such a thing, for her cat was of quite as much use, and in fact of more use, than Nelly's bird; and then she bade us run away and tell Nelly to take care she kept the cage door shut, for of course if it were left open, Puss would do her best to get the bird.

Away we ran to carry the message, very angry and very disappointed, and when we saw Nelly still standing in the same disconsolate attitude as we had left her, watching her bird as if it was the only thing she cared for on the face of this earth, we grew still more angry, and said things which—well, there is no use in pretending they were not—were very rude and very silly, and so I had better not try to excuse them.

I have heard people say that when children get into a passion they don't know what they

are saying, and if that is true, I suppose it is the reason why I can't remember what half the things were that we said about Mrs. Comfort. I know we all talked very loud, and by this time all of us had assembled in the large playroom, so that we made a great noise. I believe we called the old lady a cross old cat, I suppose because our thoughts were just then running on cats, and we thought them the most horrible things in the world; and then we said she was cruel and tyrannical, and as cross as a bear, and we hated her; and how many things of this sort we had said I am sure I don't know, when suddenly there was a kind of hush through the room, which startled me and made me turn round. I had been standing by Nelly's side, looking into the cage, and then I saw that in the midst of the hubbub Miss Power had come into the room without anyone noticing her entrance and was standing, grave and quiet as usual, in the midst of us.

She asked no questions as to the cause of the uproar she had heard, but after standing for some minutes looking at us, she just said, "Come to the schoolroom, all of you; I want you there," and turning round, left the room, evidently expecting we should all follow her; and so we did, feeling strangely cold and uncomfortable, yet wondering and curious to see what was going to happen: nothing very pleasant, most of us guessed, for though it changed so little, whether she were pleased or displeased, we were beginning to know our governess's face, and none of us felt quite comfortable about the meaning of its expression at this minute. Still she said nothing when we reached the schoolroom, only pointed with rather an impatient gesture to the forms where we always sat, and then took her usual place, and without a word to any of us began to write a little note.

It really was most queer. Rather too frightened to venture even to whisper to each

other, we sat still and watched her as her pen quickly traced a few lines. Louey Fisk, who always lived in terror of policemen, fancied she was writing to request the presence of one of those dreaded personages, and had, I believe, a strong impression that we were all going to be sent to prison ; but then Louey had had a very silly nurse, who afterwards married a policeman, and so I suppose that was why she had talked to Louey so much about them.

At any rate, as it was not post-time, it did seem very funny of Miss Power to be in such a hurry to get her letter done. If she was going to scold us, she might as well have done it first, and finished her letter afterwards. So we thought to ourselves as we watched her, and when she called a servant, who was passing the door, and handed the letter to her, with the words, " Give it to Mrs. Comfort," which all of us heard, our astonishment increased tenfold.



It was not post time.



Had she actually taken the trouble to write down all the rude speeches she had heard us utter about Mrs. Comfort, and send them straight to the old lady to read? That was my first idea, and as I glanced across the table to Kate, who sat opposite, and from her to Nelly, who sat by my side, I could see by their flushed faces that the same thought was in their heads, and that they didn't like it at all.

Then I said to myself, "What a pity it was that we came back to the schoolroom when she called us; if we had only stayed in the playroom we could have done as we liked, but here we are caught, like flies in a web."

Why was it, that though we were always declaring we wouldn't do what Miss Power bade us, yet when it came to the push we so seldom dared to disobey her, though we wished and longed to all the while? It was very strange. Aunt Sophia always used to

say my will was very strong ; she didn't mean to please me by saying so, but she always did ; I liked to think it, and to say it over to myself, but now it seemed to me that my will was only like the little tiny ripples that come running up the sea-shore on a hot summer day, while Miss Power's was like the big thundering waves that come rolling up, knocking down all the sand castles and towers that the children have been so busy building. She always seemed so certain sure that she could do just as she liked, and never one bit surprised or pleased when we did as she bade us, because it was the natural thing, and she never dreamt we should do anything else.

And so, when she came back from the door and sat down in her place, we all looked at her and waited to know our fate. Our feet were aching to get up and run about, for it was Saturday, and it seemed quite unnatural to be sitting there after twelve o'clock, and

by no means a pleasant arrangement. How long was she going to keep us waiting? At last she broke the silence. Raising her large brown eyes and looking calmly round the room at all our angry, anxious faces, she said, quietly but severely, "I need hardly tell you, I should think, that you have forfeited your usual half-holiday. How, you know as well as I do. You will dine here in the schoolroom, and spend the rest of the afternoon in preparing better than you generally do for your arithmetic and French lessons on Monday. Fetch your slates."

Fetch our slates!—do sums on Saturday!—dine in the schoolroom!—what an idea! Miss Power had gone too far at last, surely. Who would obey her now, I thought, and the idea was very delightful. "Let's run away," I whispered to Kate as we got up, apparently to get our slates, but in reality intending to rush out of the schoolroom,

and at least give Miss Power the trouble of a chase before she succeeded in imprisoning us for the whole afternoon.

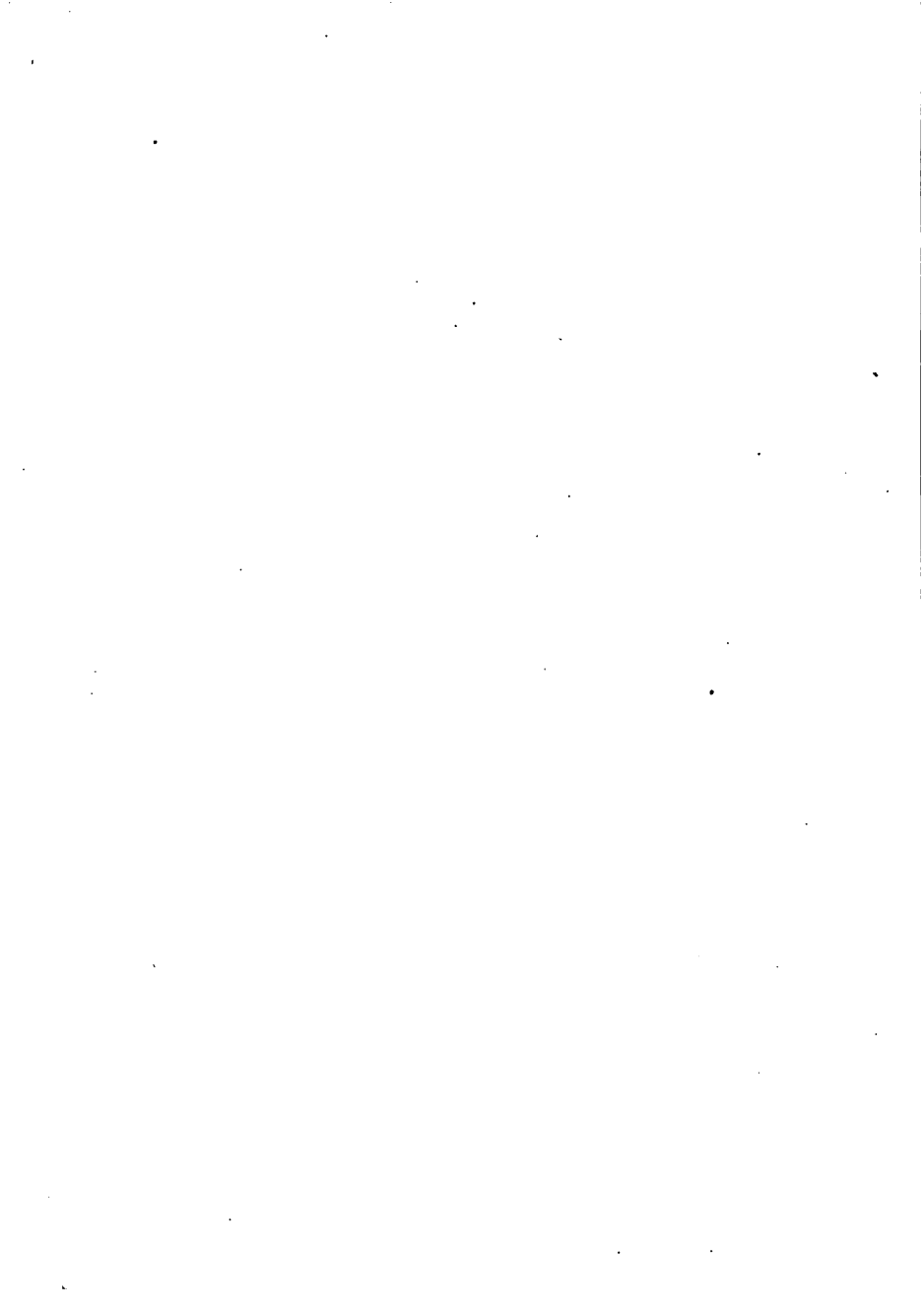
Kate nodded, and like two simpletons as we were we sprang to the door, thinking to be out of reach before Miss Power perceived our intentions. It was locked; she had secured it when she closed it after the servant; and again we felt how small we were, and how useless it was to think of baffling her. So we fetched our slates and sat down in our places again, with the double humiliation of thinking that doubtless she was rejoicing in our defeat.

But if she was, she gave no sign of any pleasure. As I turned discomfited from the door, I glanced at her, but there was not the faintest sign of triumph on her face, only the same look of sorrowful displeasure with which she had pronounced our sentence.

But though Kate and I were subdued by



Dine in the schoolroom !



finding our attempt disconcerted, a great tumult arose among the others. All of them started up, one declaring she had done nothing at all—she had scarcely said anything about Mrs. Comfort; another protesting that she didn't mean any harm; and all asserting that it was too bad to say they were to dine in the schoolroom—such a thing was never heard of!

But they might just as well have talked to the wind, which, as everybody knows, only blows all the harder the more you abuse it; and Miss Power was just the same. I ventured to look at her as Laura—I think it was Laura—said she had no right to make them dine in the schoolroom, and I saw the corners of her mouth move in a way I had never noticed before, and then I wondered how Laura could have said it.

I know I am not often frightened; I never care for cows, or thunder, or lightning, or

run away if a dog barks at me, but I was frightened then, and I began to wish that we had not troubled ourselves so much about Nelly's bird, which after all was no concern of ours, and didn't matter half as much as our half-holiday, which I began plainly to see was gone past recovery. And it was, there could be no doubt of that, for as the tumult continued, Miss Power rose from her seat, and raising her voice just a wee bit, that everybody might hear, said, in a most determined way, "Sit down to your sums directly. If I am not obeyed at once, every half-holiday this term will be forfeited."

If she had said our heads would be cut off, and, what is rather worse, that we should have castor-oil all round, there could not have been a more complete panic.

The girls stared at each other, and then, muttering and grumbling, did as they were bid, and this was the end of our battle.

Nelly said afterwards that Miss Power was just like one of those horrid big guns that the Prussians used to kill all the French with, and I think she was right; but she didn't quite kill any of us, for we had other fights yet, as you will see.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER ATTEMPT.

I AM beginning to be afraid that Nelly, or Laura, or Kate, if they ever read this book, will think that my first year at school was a very unhappy one ; because now that I come to write it, my story seems so full of quarrels and scrapes of all kinds, that people might fancy nothing pleasant ever happened ; but that would be a great mistake, because we had a great deal of fun in between whiles—I mean, in our games in the garden, when nobody was watching, and even sometimes when Miss Power was there, for she didn't always interfere with us, except in lesson-times.

But somehow or other these pleasant times

don't seem the right thing to talk about ; I believe they are not important enough ; because I suppose all children play games as we did, and think them great fun ; but people wouldn't care to read about them in books.

And the important things that happen in the world—I mean the things that people like to talk about—seem generally to be rather uncomfortable, disagreeable things. I haven't often read the newspaper, because it's such a big, awkward thing to hold ; but I used to look at it sometimes last holidays, and one day I saw that some man had written a piece at least six times as long as any of my exercises about a railway accident ; and another had written a good-sized story about a man having killed his wife ; but nobody had taken the trouble to write any pretty fairy tales or stories that would make one laugh ; so I suppose people like best to read about dreadful things, and if so, perhaps they'll like my book.

It was not long after that fuss about Nelly's bird—which by the by was eaten by the cat in the end—that my birthday came round, and as it happened to come on a Saturday, I had made up my mind to have a feast. It was altogether very provoking that I was not born in one of the warm months, because then we might have had our feast in the garden; but as I couldn't alter my birthday—which I had always been told was in November—we had to make up our minds to have our feast in the large playroom. Aunt Sophia hadn't forgotten my birthday, because I had written a few days before on purpose to remind her. She had sent me a hamper of goodies, with a birthday-cake, which would come in nicely, and Uncle Fred sent me half a sovereign, which was very useful to buy the other things.

But how to get the other things had been a great mystery, and a question which Nelly and I had fully discussed, but without coming

to any satisfactory conclusion, till one day Miss Power, having somehow or other discovered my difficulty, volunteered to take me into the town with her the day before to make my purchases.

It was most lucky, and though I rather dreaded the walk alone with our grave, silent governess, I was overjoyed at her offer, and accepted it most gratefully.

And so all the necessary provisions being obtained, and the guests being invited and needing no pressing, I was in the highest possible spirits. There was little fear of any of us running the risk of losing our holiday that day at least, and though my head was so full of my *fête* that I could hardly bestow sufficient thought on my lessons, I got through them somehow; and it seemed to me, though it must have been fancy, that Miss Power was not quite so particular as usual about my poetry being repeated without a mistake, or so horrified as she sometimes

appeared at my holding my pen badly. I think that sometimes folks don't like to scold one on one's birthday; but then Miss Power wasn't at all like other people, and never seemed to care in the least what the rest of the world thought or did.

Well, we played and romped till we were tired, and then we had our feast. Everything was delicious, the figs and plums the best we ever tasted, the chocolate only too good, alas ! for to that, and that alone, did we owe all the uncomfortable feelings that spoil the rest of the evening.

It was a great pity, for we had meant to have a charade after tea, in which several of us fancied we should distinguish ourselves greatly ; but, in consequence of that chocolate, we didn't feel in the least inclined to move. Nelly said she couldn't help thinking of the time when she went with her mamma in a steamboat to France ; and as for me, I began to have a strong misgiving that in matters of

eating and drinking, grown-up people had somehow or other contrived to become wiser than we small people were.

For you see, it had never entered my head that even if we did eat up all the chocolate I had bought, we should make ourselves ill ; in fact, I never thought at all about it. However, there is no fear that I shall make myself ill with chocolate again, because ever since that time I have hated the sight of it, and wondered that anyone could think of eating it.

Mrs. Comfort was generally very sorry when we were ill, and nursed and petted us ; but somehow or other no one seemed to care much about our miseries this time. The old lady said something that none of us understood, about learning wisdom by experience ; and Miss Power seemed amused rather than sorry, which made me dislike her more than ever ; for it was a miserable finish to my birthday, and a great disappointment to us all.

It was soon after this that our hopes of getting rid of Miss Power began to revive; I don't exactly remember why, but I think it was on account of some remarks we overheard which passed between her and the lady who taught the very little ones in the school. From this conversation we fancied that she was thoroughly discouraged and very tired of us all, and highly pleased we were at the discovery.

"You see we shall succeed after all," Nelly said to me; "what fun if we make her go!"

"Hush! hush! Nelly," I exclaimed in terror, for the two governesses were at that moment by no means so entirely out of hearing as she seemed to think, and as Nelly spoke I was frightened to see Miss Power's eyes fixed on us as if a new idea had occurred to her.

Nelly looked startled too; but not liking the idea that she had betrayed us by her careless exclamation, she recovered herself

quickly, and said, "Oh, she can't have heard, though she *is* always listening and spying about; nobody could possibly have heard what I said at that distance."

"I am not so sure of that," I replied; "and if she did, she will stay on, on purpose to plague us."

"I think she looks very pale," Nelly remarked; "if we make her ill she will have to go, you know; Mrs. Comfort won't keep her if she gets ill, because she wouldn't be fit to teach us."

"I don't want her to get really ill," I answered; "at least, not so ill as to die; all I want is for her to go away."

"Well, we must go on being very disagreeable, and she'll go, depend upon it," Nelly persisted; but I saw Miss Power's eyes fixed on us, and again I felt very doubtful whether any such result would follow our efforts.

Still I was quite determined not to be

outdone by Nelly, and when she said the next morning in a sleepy way, after the maid had called us, "Suppose we don't get up for another half-hour, and let's see what Miss Power will say to *that*," I was quite ready to acquiesce in the plan, and jumped out of bed without a moment's hesitation to go and inform our schoolfellows in the other room of our intention, and persuade them to act as we were doing.

As it is certainly much easier to induce people to stay in bed than to get up, I had very little difficulty in convincing them that nobody would get into trouble for laziness, since Miss Power would not venture to punish everybody at once. I suppose we were all too sleepy to remember the half-holiday that she had deprived us of; and we had got into the way of saying she would not dare, or would not venture, to do anything that we particularly disliked, without thinking whether there was the least sense in such remarks.

So, assuring ourselves and each other that though she would be horribly cross, she would see that she could not help it if we chose to lie in bed longer than usual, we disregarded all the maid's entreaties, and only got up when the bell rang, which was the signal for us to present ourselves in the schoolroom. Then we dressed in a most leisurely fashion, each of us, I believe, being secretly determined not to be the first to appear in the presence, or to face the displeasure, of our offended governess. However, we were ready at last, and inwardly trembling, but loudly protesting that it was great fun, we went down-stairs, and sailed into the schoolroom with great appearance of indifference, but a decided feeling of apprehension.

I think that till she had scanned our faces with that searching glance of hers, Miss Power was not quite certain whether our late appearance was to be laid to intentional or accidental laziness; but receiving no apology

or excuse of any kind, she took no further notice of us than to bid Laura, who entered last, to shut the door, and then she took up a book that she had been reading when we came in, and seemed again quite absorbed in its contents.

It was most aggravating: was there no way of making her cross, or provoking her to scold us? No; she leaned back in her chair, and looked as quiet and comfortable as if we were all sweet little cherubs, and had never done anything naughty in our lives. But when the breakfast-bell rang, and we were bundling together our books in a great hurry to put them away, she laid down her book, and said in that provokingly quiet way in which she always spoke, "You need not move, you will have your breakfasts here; Mrs. Comfort does not care to take her breakfast with children who disregard her rules, and take no trouble to please her." And without taking the least notice of our discontented, sulky



A great hunch of bread.



faces, she rang the bell, and bade the servant bring us each some dry bread for breakfast.

And we had fancied, or pretended we fancied, that she wouldn't dare to take any notice of our disobedience; we were disagreeably surprised, for here we were again made to pay dearly for our determination to have our own way. We had felt so sure we should vex and annoy her, and, to all appearance, we were to be the only sufferers by our performance.

Nothing but a great hunch of dry bread for breakfast, and nothing at all to drink!—we should be choked; we could not, and we would not eat it, we would rather go without. So we all declared, and so we thought for a long, long time.

Thinking thus we sat in our places, each with her bread before her, hour after hour. The clock struck nine, and the hands went slowly, slowly round, seeming every now and then to stand quite still; but at last it struck

ten, and we said to ourselves that one hour was gone, and by and by Miss Power would get tired of doing nothing; and when she saw that we were determined to have our own way, she would of course give in.

Of that we felt quite certain; and very likely she would have given in long before had not Dolly Davies been so silly. She always was. I suppose she was very sleepy when she woke, and went to sleep again without thinking what she was doing, for before she had done dressing she began saying she wished she had got up when she was first called; and when Miss Power made that speech about our breaking rules, she began to cry in the most ridiculous way, and ate her bread up directly it was given her, and then set to work to do her lessons, just like a story-book child.

It made me so cross; for of course Miss Power thought we should all do the same in a very little while, and that made her so

obstinate, or, as grown-up people call it, so determined.

But, talking about Dolly, I must say I do think she was the very silliest child I ever knew. She was always thinking she had done wrong; she used to call herself naughty if she didn't know her lessons, or if she got into a little bit of a passion; and she would fret and cry about it, as if she was the only person in the world who did such things. And then, when she had done crying, she would give herself a shake, and say, "Now I will not do that again; I *will* be good—I'm quite determined." And yet, somehow, Dolly used to look and seem happier than we were; and I have often heard people say what a good little face she had.

As for the rest of us and our bread, we sat looking at it till the clock struck eleven, and again till the twelve o'clock bell rang, and by that time I at least was getting very hungry, so hungry that even dry bread did

not look so very nasty. And besides, it was very provoking to think that our play-time was all slipping away, and we were doing nothing at all but sitting still. And it was not only that; another idea, still more unpleasant, came into my head. It would not be very long before the dinner-bell rang; already an inviting smell was beginning to ascend from the kitchen regions, and it would be aggravating to the last degree if Dolly was allowed to have her dinner while we had nothing but dry bread. Could it be possible that Miss Power would venture to deprive us of our dinner?—an hour before I had thought it quite impossible; but now I was beginning to think that she would not scruple to do anything that she took into her head.

And at this point of my meditations I glanced round the room, and, greatly to my surprise, and not a little to my indignation, I perceived that three of my schoolfellows had already arrived at this conclusion, and had



Nobody wished to be starved.

weakly and basely given in. They might at least have waited for me to set the example, as they had lately been in the habit of doing; they might have been quite sure I would have taken care that nobody was starved.

But no; they had settled the matter for themselves. There would be little use in my making myself uncomfortable—perhaps losing my dinner in the public cause. If they had only all done as I had meant to, and refused to eat the bread at any price, Miss Power might have been convinced that it was of no use to try to force us to do whatever she chose; but for one alone to stand out could be of no use at all.

And besides, I was beginning to feel very hungry; and though from where I sat in the schoolroom I could not see the clock, I felt pretty sure it was almost dinner-time. Yes, I could hear the servants beginning to bring the plates and knives and forks, and the others I plainly saw, had heard it too. Well, it was

some comfort to think that though I could not get my own way, I had been the last to give in.

Miss Power must have seen that; and, if so, she would have discovered that I was very nearly as determined as she was. It was quite plain that we had given in simply and solely because nobody wished to starve; our fathers paid for our dinners, and so we were resolved we would have them.

CHAPTER IX.

MAKING A BED.

PEOPLE say that dogs, and cats, and such creatures grow very fond of their masters, even if they beat them and are cruel to them; and sometimes the children in story-books seem to me like dogs in this respect. I remember once reading a story of a boy called Richard—I have always hated the name Richard ever since, though I really don't know why. Well, this boy was always fond of tasting everything he saw—and I don't see any harm in that, it hurt nobody but himself—and one day he saw a bottle on the mantel-shelf filled with some stuff that looked extremely nice. Of course he wanted to know

what it was like, and so he was just tasting it when a most disagreeable uncle came into the room, rushed at him, held him by the nose—which seemed to me a very awkward thing to hold any one by—and made him drink the whole bottleful.

Now the stuff was castor-oil, and though it is a medicine and intended to do people good, it is very nasty stuff, and always makes me sick and ill. So, though the story-book tries to make people believe that it was the boy who was naughty, and the uncle who was good and wise, I think it was just the other way, for the boy certainly could have hurt nobody but himself, while the uncle might have, and I think must have, made Richard very ill. But that is only like all story-books, they are so unnatural, and instead of the boy hating his uncle, as I should have done, this large dose of castor-oil is made out to have cured him of all his bad habits, whatever they were, and



It was rather cold, to be sure.



he loved his uncle as much or more than ever.

But our fight with Miss Power had quite a different result ; we had disliked her before, but now we *almost* hated her. I should have said *quite*, only it's wicked to *hate* anybody, and so I suppose we only disliked her tremendously and prodigiously. How much, I can't tell you, it would want more figures than I can count to describe how much our dislike had increased.

I never had *wished* to learn my lessons well since she came, but if now I had wished ever so much, I couldn't have done it ; because all my thoughts were now busy planning how we could pay her out for her cruelty and obstinacy.

And at last we hit upon a plan which seemed to us a capital one, and then we began to feel happier. Even now, when I think about it, though such dreadful things have happened since, I can't help being

amused and laughing to myself, though all the while I wish I hadn't done it. You see when I write about the times before my illness, the old feelings come back, because I try very hard to remember exactly what happened, and to talk as we talked then, and not as we do now, because so many things have changed since my illness, as you will understand when I come to tell you about it.

Our plan was a very odd one ; it wasn't altogether mine, or altogether Nelly's, but we made it up between us ; I think Nelly first proposed it, but I improved it, or made it worse, which is all the same thing. Nelly had been reading a book in the holidays about a boy's school, and ever since then she had been full of the idea that it must be much greater fun to be a boy than a girl, and was continually wishing that she had been born a boy, and sent to Harrow or Rugby, or one of those big schools, where the boys manage

everything for themselves, and the masters seem to have nothing to do with them. I think it was something in this book that put the idea into Nelly's head which she told to me, and which ended as I am going to tell you.

One afternoon in the week—I think it was Wednesday—Miss Power used always to go into the town to do some errands for Mrs. Comfort; she was generally away for some hours, and that was the time we chose to carry out our plan. It was the afternoon when we had our dancing-lesson, and as Mrs. Comfort liked to sit in the room and watch us, Miss Power was free to go as early as she liked.

Everything turned out exactly as we had hoped. Miss Power started before we had quite done dressing for our lesson, and as soon as she was safely out of the house we were in her room, as busy as possible, making the most of our time; for, you know, Mr. Pigeon's ring might be heard any minute, and

then we should have to rush downstairs, whether our work was done or not ; and who could tell whether Miss Power might not return before our lesson was over ; and we had a great deal to do.

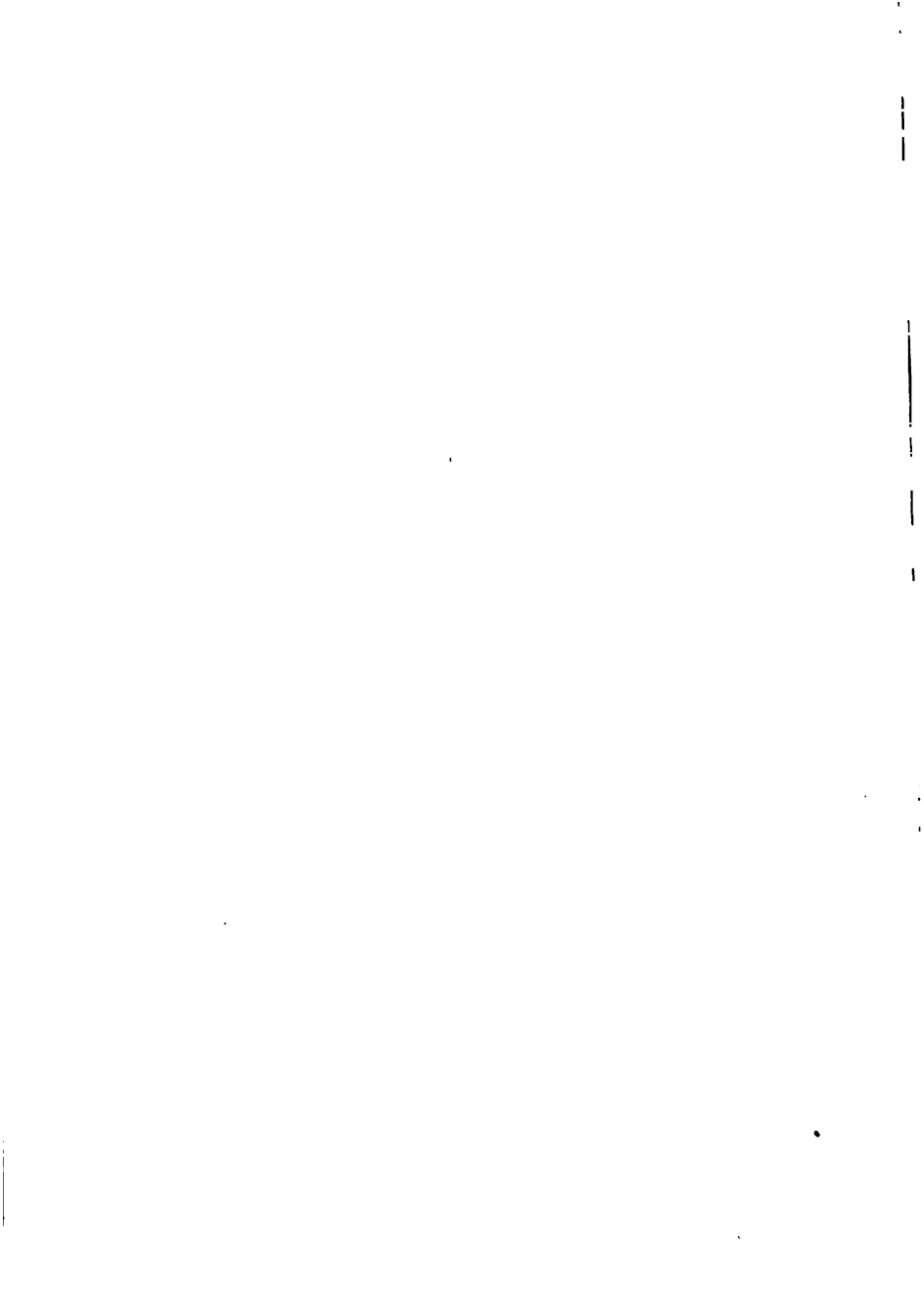
“ She must go if she cannot sleep ! ” was Kate’s exclamation, as she triumphantly surveyed some pins which she had carefully inserted, points uppermost, in the bed. “ I hope she gets into bed carefully.”

“ She can hardly help getting cold—see how wet my sponge has made the sheets,” cried Louey Fisk ; “ she is very fond of water, so now she will enjoy herself thoroughly.”

“ How she will wonder where her shoes and brush and comb have gone to, when she comes in,” muttered one of the little ones, who had been collecting all the loose articles that she could find in the room, and stowing them carefully away under the pillow of the bed ; “ she will never guess that we have been in



She must go, if she cannot sleep.



her bedroom; she would think we should not dare."

Meanwhile Nelly and I were adding to the collection of strange articles already deposited—a quantity of orange-peel, a clothes' brush, some scraps of dry crust, which seemed to us specially appropriate, as likely to remind her of our ground of complaint—some nutshells, and some old rusty nails.

We were greatly charmed with the appearance of the bed when all was done; but, unfortunately, we had but little time to admire our work, for that tiresome Mr. Pigeon made his appearance, and we had to go off to our dancing without even five minutes' talk about Miss Power's astonishment when she found out what we had been doing in her absence.

It was very tantalising, because Nelly and I had at least a dozen things to say to each other, and all through our lesson, while we were practising our quadrille steps, we were

thinking of nothing but how funny the bed looked, and hoping that the servants would not find out that anything had happened when they went to turn it down for the night.

And this thought, I must own, made me very uneasy. Though I had learnt a great many things since I came to Mrs. Comfort's, I hadn't the least idea in the world how to make a bed, and none of the others were much wiser than I was ; so, though we tried very hard to make things look just the same as they always did, I was by no means sure we had succeeded ; and if the maids were to suspect anything wrong, our whole plan would be spoilt.

But then Mrs. Comfort was very easy-going with her servants, and did not always seem to mind much if they forgot to do their work ; I suppose she did not like to be so unkind as to scold them ; indeed, she never liked scolding anybody.

And so I know they used sometimes to forget to do the bedrooms at all, and with all my heart I hoped they would forget that day; it would be so very lucky if they did.

We had not thought about this before, and when the idea of the danger of discovery came into my head, it made me very uncomfortable, so that as soon as ever the dancing-lesson was over, I lost no time in telling Kate and Nelly and Laura all about my fears. Laura and Kate were very grave, but Nelly, who always looked on the bright side of everything, laughed at us, and said that there was not the least danger of the servants betraying us, even if they did find out the trick we had played Miss Power; they liked her no better than we did, she was sure, for she had heard the housemaids grumbling many times, and saying that they never knew anyone half so particular about the dusting in her room, and about the chairs being set straight. They called her a fidgety old maid,

Nelly said, and she was quite sure that if they found out what we had been doing, they would laugh as much as we should when we heard Miss Power's groans when she got into bed ; for we fully intended to stay awake to hear them, as we did not doubt we should when the time came.

"She will think nobody is listening, and so she will say just what she thinks. How she will abuse us!" Laura exclaimed, and she looked as if nothing could give her greater pleasure.

"I shouldn't wonder if she cried—she will be so miserable," Kate remarked ; and Nelly, no doubt recalling something of her own illness, added, "Yes ; there is nothing so horrible as having crumbs in one's bed ; it makes one feel so uncomfortable. I know I have often cried about it when I couldn't get rid of them. It was a capital idea of ours, Maggie, to put those old crusts in among the other things."

I had no doubt at all of that; but I always liked Nelly to admire my ideas, and this had been mine entirely. Nelly was such a comforting person; she always thought that things were sure to go right, while I, I am afraid, am inclined to be too anxious, at least I know I have sometimes got two lines on my face like old people have, and Laura says they are caused by anxiety.

But though Nelly was quite happy about our plan, and though I thought I was too, I know we both felt in a great fever and flutter all that evening, and when bedtime came, there was no need for anyone to tell us twice to go, we were only too ready and eager to be off.

Now, the very oldest of us all went to bed at eight o'clock, the younger ones at half-past seven, so that we had at least two hours to wait before the great event came off for which we were all determined to keep awake.

There was not the faintest hope that any thing could make Miss Power come up to bed before ten o'clock, we knew quite well that she never did, and the two hours would be very long indeed to wait.

If we could only have one of our old games with pillows, or even tell stories, as we did when Miss Careless was our governess, it would have been quite easy for us to keep ourselves awake; but, as usual, we dared not speak aloud for fear we should be overheard and ordered to lie down, for then, as we all knew, there would be little hopes of keeping awake.

So we whispered and made signs to each other, and though it was very cold to sit up in bed, to be sure, we persevered rather than risk falling asleep by lying down; for not for anything would we miss the fun that we felt sure must be coming. But, oh! those hours did seem long, very long indeed.

CHAPTER X.

A LONG EVENING.

NELLY says they were the longest hours she ever knew. She thinks the clock must have stopped; but that is a mistake, because I remember perfectly well hearing it strike nine, and afterwards, an enormous time afterwards, almost a year it seemed, I heard it strike ten. I counted the strokes each time, so I am quite sure, and I don't think I shall ever forget all the different things that happened on that dreadful evening if I live a hundred years, which I don't suppose I shall.

What those different things were I don't think you will much care to hear, because they were none of them great events, and I

know that when I read a story I always miss all the talks, and only read about the important events.

But unless I tell all the little things that happened, you will never, never understand what a long, long evening it was. Some of us began to think that the hours in the night were longer ones than those in the day. Kate was quite certain of it, and she told us how when one night she had been kept awake with the toothache, she had counted sixty that she might find out when each minute was passed; and she knows, and is quite certain, that she counted sixty at least a hundred times between the clock striking nine and ten, which proves that there are at least a hundred minutes in the night hours instead of sixty, as the arithmetic books pretend. I suppose the men that make up the arithmetic books don't lie awake at night, and so of course they don't know. I think I've heard somewhere that the sun has

something to do with the time, and keeps the clocks right, and so I daresay that when he goes to bed they do what they like.

But that has nothing to do with the events of that night, which I meant to tell you about. The first was rather amusing; and if we hadn't been afraid of Miss Power overhearing us, I am sure we should have laughed outright; as it was, we were obliged to stuff the sheets and corners of the pillows into our mouths to stifle the noises which we could not help making. It was all caused by Louey Fisk's fears, or as she called it, her nervousness; I don't know where she learnt such a long word, and I'm quite sure she hadn't the least idea what it meant, because I haven't, and I am ever so much older than Louey. Well, the poor little thing found it very hard to keep awake, and she kept on falling asleep for a minute, and then waking up in a great fright, all about nothing. And suddenly after one of her short naps, she started up, declaring

she heard a mouse squeak, which proved plainly that there must be one in the room, and of all things in the world, Louey declared, she hated mice.

"They can't hurt you, Louey," whispered Nelly, whose bed was close to Louey's, and who, as I said before, was a most comforting person; "why are you afraid of them?"

"Oh, I don't know, they might get into my bed, and bite holes in my toes; rats bite people, I know, and mice are very much like rats. Oh! there it is again."

"Never mind, Louey," Nelly whispered again; "if you feel any of them in your bed, just jump into mine, and I'll take care of you; I'm not one bit afraid of mice."

"But they might get into yours too; oh dear, oh dear, what shall I do!" groaned Louey, piteously; "I wish Miss Power or Bates would come and drive them away."

"They would only run into their holes in the wall, and come out again as soon as

everything was quiet," Kate replied, scornfully. "The idea of being afraid of mice, Louey!"

"But I am, and I can't help it," poor Louey replied, now almost sobbing; "if they don't go away quickly, I shall jump out of bed and run down to Miss Power in the schoolroom."

"And the mice would run after you, biting your toes all the way," Kate answered, for she was a terrible tease, and always loved to frighten Louey.

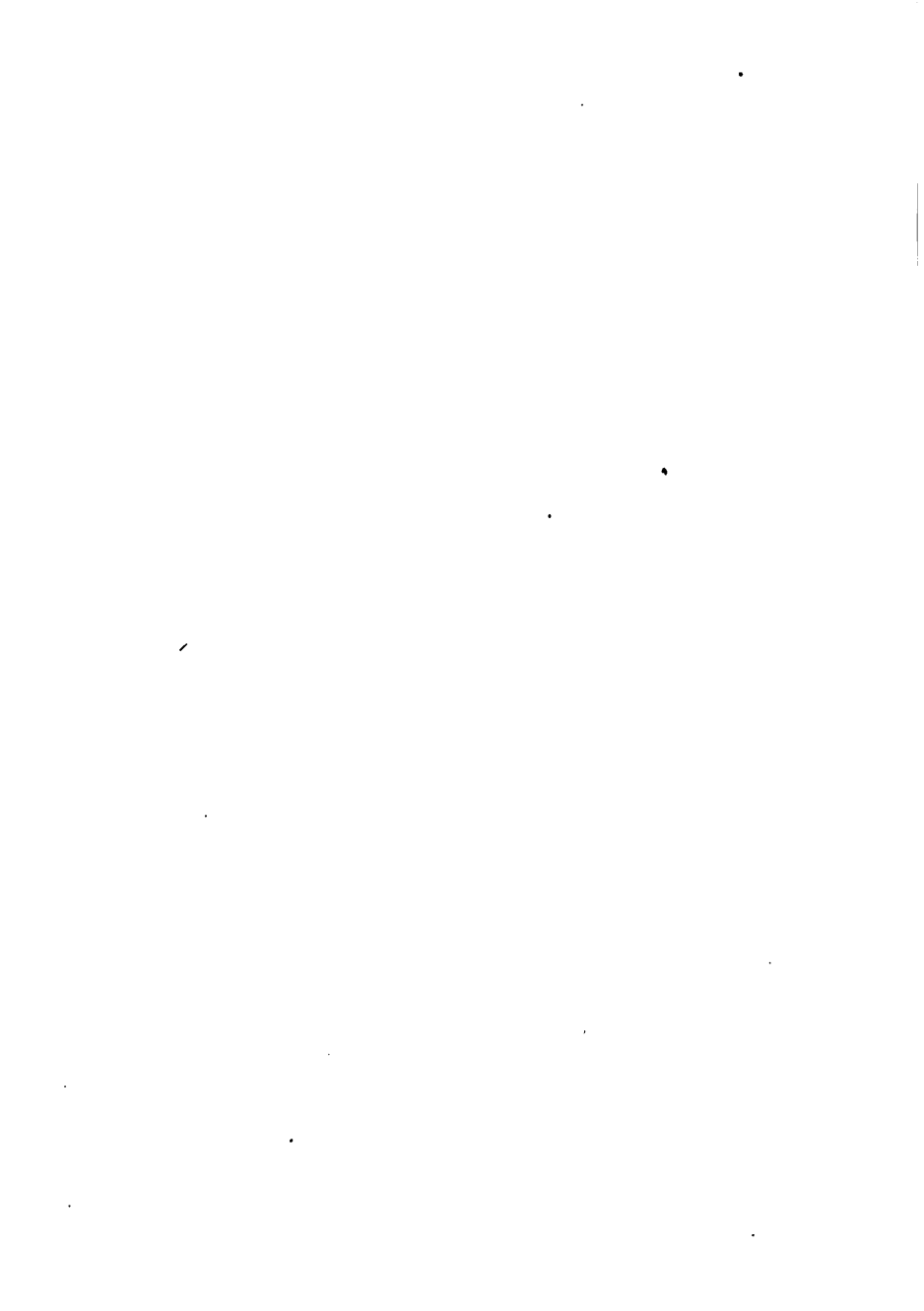
Just at this moment the faint noise that had startled the child increased to a most alarming extent; but though it frightened her almost out of her wits, it reassured and somewhat relieved the rest of us, many of whom, in spite of our vehement assertions to the contrary, were nearly as much afraid of mice as she was. For it was now quite evident that what she had taken for the squeaking and scratching of mice was nothing

at all but the creaking of a cupboard door in the passage outside our room ; and when at last it shut with a loud bang, the mistake was so evident that, as I said before, we had hard work to keep our laughter from breaking forth, and perhaps bringing some one upstairs to inquire what had kept us so long awake—a question which would be most unwelcome, inasmuch as no one had an answer prepared which would be likely to satisfy even Mrs. Comfort.

We were quite glad of the amusement that this little affair caused, for it woke us up just when we were getting most overpoweringly sleepy. It was soon after this that nine o'clock struck, and then we knew that we had still another hour to wait. Louey Fisk and Annie Shaw, the two little ones who slept in our room, however, soon grew sleepy again, and long before ten o'clock came they were nodding and gaping, and wishing with all their hearts that they had



The little ones could not keep awake.



gone to sleep at first, and had a nap before Miss Power came up.

“Have one now, Annie,” I said, and the words were scarcely out of my mouth before it became plain that it was quite out of the question for them to keep up the struggle much longer: the little ones positively could not keep awake. They had tried hard, but the end of it was that poor little Annie, being determined not to lie down, lest she should fall asleep in spite of all her resolutions to the contrary, had sat up in bed nodding, till at last, with one tremendous nod, she had tumbled right out, and lay on the floor sleeping as comfortably as if she were still in bed.

So Nelly and I had to get up and lift her in again, but she knew nothing about it, for she never woke, though we had great difficulty in lifting her, for she was a very fat child, and we were laughing so that we could scarcely stand.

Just as we had bundled her back into bed, the moon came out and shone right into the room : I don't know where it had been before, nor why it popped round the corner so suddenly ; but it threw a bright light on Annie's face, so round, and fat, and rosy, and we could plainly see that she was as sound asleep as if she had never tumbled out of bed at all ; and I do believe that she was so tired that if we had taken her and rolled her downstairs, she would not even have opened her eyes, but have lain quite comfortably on the rug at the bottom, and slept till the next morning.

However, she was not fated to sleep so quietly as that even in her bed ; but that was my fault, not hers.

For when ten o'clock struck at last, after keeping us all waiting for it an interminable time, we began to think that the reward of our patience was close at hand. We heard Miss Power come upstairs, and go into her

own room and shut the door, and then we began to grow very excited. There was a very convenient crack under her door, and through it we could see her light burning; she would of course extinguish the light before she got into bed, so as long as that crack was lighted up, we should know that she had not betaken herself to rest, as people say when they write poetry.

"I am afraid that hair of hers takes a long time brushing," said Kate, in an under tone; "it is such rough, coarse stuff, it must want a great deal of brushing and no end of pomatum to make it lie smooth." Kate had very thin hair herself; and always said she disliked people who had much—it made them look so untidy.

"She is washing herself with a great deal of soap to try to make herself look white instead of brown," remarked Nelly, who was very fair, and who always said it was Miss Power's dark skin that she disliked so much.

"Oh, what an enormous time she is undressing," groaned Laura, who was quite tired out; "I believe all her clothes are worn out, and she has to mend them every night when she comes up to bed."

"Yes; they look very old," I replied, under my breath, for ever since that night when Miss Power had so suddenly appeared by my bedside and interrupted my game with Laura, I had never been able to divest my mind of the idea that she might be somewhere in the room unseen and unheard, though really and truly I knew quite well that she was in her own room preparing for bed.

"She hasn't had a new frock since she came," Nelly said, very positively; "and yet she must have some money to buy new ones, for you know she buys postage-stamps, and they cost money."

"Well, I would rather spend my money on new frocks than on postage-stamps, and I would buy frocks of prettier colours than she

generally wears, if I were her," said Laura, who was very fond of all the brightest colours, and had a blue cotton frock, a pink one, and a green one.

"I shall go and see what she is doing," I exclaimed, my impatience getting the better of my prudence; "we can't be kept awake all night just to please her." Now what I meant by this speech I really don't know, for I don't suppose I imagined that our staying awake could give the least pleasure to our governess.

"What are you going to do, Maggie?" exclaimed Laura and Kate in dismay, seeing me jump out of bed, and snatch up some lucifer-matches which happened to be on the mantel-piece: how they came there I can't remember; I am sure Miss Power did not know that we had such things in the room, or she would have taken them away, for fear we should play with them.

"I am going to see what she is doing; I

am tired of waiting," I exclaimed. "I shall light some matches and peep through the keyhole, and see what she is about."

The girls exclaimed at the idea of such a thing, "She will hear you, and come to the door, and what a scrape we shall get into; oh, Maggie, take care."

"Yes, I'll take care; be quiet, don't make a noise," I replied, and with the feeling that I was doing a very brave and venturesome thing, I crept on tiptoe to the door that led from our room to Miss Power's, and struck four or five matches at once in a bunch, which made a splendid flare through our dark room.

"Oh, you've found the matches; what a brilliant idea!" Laura exclaimed, starting up in bed and leaning towards me to watch all my proceedings with the closest attention; but the next minute she started back in terror.



The matches, what a brilliant idea !

CHAPTER XI.

TWO PEOPLE HURT.

DO think that the man who invented lucifer-matches ought to have been hanged or had his head cut off; what right had he to make such dangerous things? It is true they are useful sometimes, and some people say that we couldn't do without them. But I know that people used to do without them once upon a time, and so that can't be true, and though people find them handy to light fires with, for my part I think they might just as well use lighted candles as matches. Nelly says we couldn't have lighted candles without the matches to light them with, but I say that if we must have matches—which I don't believe—our clothes, and

especially our nightgowns, ought to be made of stuff that won't burn—of stuff like carpets or counterpanes, and I do wonder very much that no one has found that out yet. I think that if everybody got burned once in their lives they would get much wiser than they are, and leave off wearing things that catch fire directly a spark touches them. They cannot be the right kind of thing to wear, for though some people may think it a trifle to get burnt, that is only because they have never tried it, and I can assure them that now I know what it is like, I mean to be very careful, and never to stand too near the fire, or touch a candle or a lighted match, as long as I live.

For though people will have it that it was all my own fault, I know I was as careful as I could possibly be. I held the matches quite tight, I did not drop them about the room as some people do, and I should have held them in the same way till they were quite burnt

up if one stupid thing hadn't been quicker than the others and burnt right up to my fingers before the others were half finished.

Then of course I let it drop, because it startled me so; but I had not the least idea that it would set my night-gown on fire, or that it would even touch it: how could I have guessed? I am sure I have watched the housemaid light match after match, sometimes till she has used five or six, before she can make the fire light, and they are intended to be burnt, and I am not.

You can never imagine, unless you try it, how very hot one feels directly one's clothes catch fire. The very instant I dropped that stupid match, which had got burnt up so much quicker than the others, I felt flaming hot all over, just as if I had been put into a bath when it was much too hot, only if I had been in a bath I would have jumped out and got rid of the pain. And now the fire was on me; how I screamed and how I jumped! But

my night-gown only flamed up the more, and I do believe I should have been burnt up to nothing in another minute if Miss Power's door hadn't suddenly opened, and instead of running away, as Kate and Laura did when they saw what had happened, she seized me in her arms, squeezing me so tight that for a minute I thought that I would just as soon be burnt as suffocated. But I only thought that for just one minute, because the next moment I remembered that somebody told me once that when the little Princes were smothered in the Tower, it is as likely as not that they felt no pain at all; while all those people who were burnt in Queen Mary's reign seemed to suffer horribly, so that it is quite plain that it is better to be smothered than burnt.

However, I am very glad I was neither suffocated nor burnt alive, because I would much rather die like other people do; I shouldn't care to have people talking about



How I screamed !

me, and writing bits in the newspapers about me, because they might say things that were untrue, and I should be dead and not able to contradict them.

If I had got burnt to death that night, as I should have done if Miss Power had not run out and picked me up, Nelly thinks the whole tale would have been told in the papers, and that would have been most disagreeable, and I know it would have been full of stories. They would have headed it with "Dreadful death of a child from playing with lucifer-matches." That wouldn't have been true, because I wasn't *playing* with the matches, you know ; and then they would have said it was careless of Bates to leave them in our room, and that wouldn't have been true either, because she didn't know they were there. I can think of lots more stories that they would have told, and so I am very glad that I didn't die, and they lost the chance.

But I never meant to have told you that I didn't die for ever so long; I meant to have frightened you first, as people always do in story-books. I was going to make it out that I was very bad—ever so bad—quite too bad ever to get well again; and then, when you couldn't help thinking that there was no hope at all, that I must die, I would recover suddenly. But I have let the cat out of the bag too soon, so I can't help it, though it is a pity, for though Nelly says you must have known I got well again, because I couldn't have written this book if I hadn't, it strikes me that you mightn't ever have thought of that.

But though you have guessed, or rather I have told you, that I got better, perhaps you would like to know how it happened. And so I must confess, what at first I didn't at all like to think about, and that is, that though I had been so unkind and naughty to Miss Power, it was all through her that my

life was saved. At first I wished that she had let me die, but that thought went away as quickly as the one about being suffocated had gone, and the next minute I didn't care one bit who saved me so long as I was saved; that was all I cared about, for I was in a most dreadful fright. I thought I was going to die, and the feelings I had were horrible, and the thoughts that went scudding through my head terrified me so that I didn't know what to do. I thought about the many times I had said I couldn't do my lessons; about the names I had called Miss Power; about my obstinacy and laziness; about my teaching the others to be as bad as I was, and I knew that if I got burnt it was only just what I deserved. How queer it is how fast one can think sometimes, for I remember it all quite well, and I know I had all these thoughts and a great many more before Miss Power had managed to carry me, all in flames as I was, into her room and lay me on her bed.

Even as she threw the counterpane on the flames—which seemed to me a very odd thing to do—I remember thinking to myself how funny it was that the bed was not full of bumps and hard things as we had left it, so I suppose she had found out our trick, and had cleared all the things out of the bed before my accident happened. She knew all about my naughtiness, and yet she saved my life. I wish she hadn't known it—oh, I wish she hadn't, it does make me feel so very small, so miserably small and babyish !

It seems very strange that I should have been able to think of anything else but the pain of my burns, for they did give me terrible pain, but yet in spite of that, and in spite of the fright I was in, I kept on thinking all the while about the bad things I had been doing, and could not help saying to myself, just as if I was saying a lesson, "It's your own fault, Maggie, you deserve it all; it's your own fault, and nobody else's."



She threw the counterpane over the flames.

And when the doctor came to look at my burns and to dress them for me, I told him so, because he was pitying me, and I didn't deserve any pity and I wouldn't have it!

Kate and Laura seemed to think I needn't have told anybody how the accident happened, but I was sick of making up stories, and pretending what wasn't true, and so I told it all out, for I knew that nobody could hate me more than I hated myself. Laura said it was a sudden change indeed, and she wondered what had taken all the spirit out of me; but I couldn't talk then, I only sobbed out, "the fire;" and then Mrs. Comfort turned them all out of the room.

I was glad when they went back to bed and left me in peace, for, though I was in too much pain to go to sleep, notwithstanding the doctor having given me some stuff to compose me, I wanted to be able to think, and that is a thing that I never can do when people are talking all round me.

Yes, the fire had taken all the spirit out of me, in one sense at least, but it was a bad spirit, I am sure, and so the sooner it went the better. What's the use in having what people call a high spirit, if it only makes you wicked and mischievous, hurting yourself and everybody you come near? I often hear people talk about high-spirited children, and I always say to myself, "Then they're like me—a torment to themselves and everybody about them."

And yet it sounds very fine to be called high-spirited; I've always liked it; but let me see, what does it mean? Doesn't a high-spirited child mean a child that always tries to get its own way, that hates to be told it must do anything and always determines it won't?—doesn't it mean a child that always thinks it can manage and settle everything for itself—at least, that's exactly like me, and I've always been called high-spirited? And haven't I been a disagreeable child?—

yes, I *am* a child, though I am nearly ten years old, and I'll call myself so as often as I can—haven't I been a disagreeable child, a conceited child, an obstinate child, a hateful child?—haven't I made Nelly, and Kate, and Laura, and all the little ones tiresome, disobedient, and teasing to Miss Power, just because I thought it would be a fine, high-spirited thing to make her go?—as if we could! it seems quite ridiculous to me now.

And I've made myself quite ridiculous too—naughty and ridiculous. How Miss Power must have laughed at me sometimes, when she was all alone in her bedroom! The idea of our thinking that we could make her go, or that she would care for our imitating her!—I daresay she wrote and told her mother about our silly tricks.

Oh dear! oh dear!—well, I can't help it now. But it's all been a mistake, there's no doubt about that. I wonder how it began. Why have I lived my life so badly?

I used to mean to be a good child. I remember—oh, so long ago it seems, it must have been before Aunt Sophia had me—somebody—I wonder who it was—used to put my hands together and teach me to say some words which I have almost forgotten, but I think they were—

“Lamb of God, I look to Thee,
Thou shalt my example be ;
Thou wast humble, meek, and mild,
Thou wast once a little child.”

So I had an example set me—a copy that means, but I never tried to copy it, and that's the reason, I suppose, why I've never been humble, meek, and mild. It would have been better for me, and better for Laura, and Kate, and everybody, if nobody had ever called me high-spirited, or looked as if they liked it.

I don't know whether I thought all this on that one night, but I had several more days and nights in bed before my burns got

right, I don't know how many ; and so I had plenty of time to think, and when Nelly, and Kate, and Laura came to see me, we used to talk about the same things that I was always thinking of. At first we all felt shy, for you know it isn't at all a pleasant thing to say, "I've been very naughty, but I'm going to be good," and we all waited for each other to begin. Perhaps as I'd been the worst, they thought it was only fair that I should have to do it ; and really, to tell the truth, now my spirits were quite gone, I didn't care what I said ; and besides, it is much easier to be humble, and good, and gentle in bed than when you're up. I hope I shan't grow high-spirited again now that my burns are well.

One night I remember particularly well, because my burns were very bad just then, and kept me awake a good deal, and my thoughts too were very troublesome, as they are sometimes. And I tossed and tossed

about, and turned over and over, and couldn't get myself comfortable anyhow, till at last I made three resolutions about what I'd do and what I wouldn't do when I got well again, though I wasn't at all sure then whether I ever should get well again—people do die of their burns sometimes, don't they?

Well, first I thought that if ever I did recover, I'd never, never, as long as I lived, say that I couldn't learn a lesson until I'd tried for at least one hour; for you know I'd often said I couldn't when the truth really was that I wouldn't, and that's wrong, as I can see quite well now, because it's the business of children to do as they're told.

Then, the second thing I promised to myself was, that I'd tell all the girls how completely I'd changed my mind about Miss Power; how I didn't think her at all cross now, but very kind and forgiving, because, you see, she'd known all about my naughtiness, and yet she hadn't punished me by

letting me get burnt right up to a cinder, as she might have done.

And in the third place, I resolved that whatever I meant to do myself, I'd never try and make other people do the same—I'd never want to be queen or leader again; because it's very horrid, yes, it's dreadful to think that you may be teaching other children to be wicked too. I wonder I didn't think of that before, but somehow I seem to have been asleep and dreaming.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW LESSON.

BUT whatever I dreamt in my sleep, there was one thing that never entered my head, I suppose because I'm selfish, and never think about other people at all. It seems very queer to me that I never thought of asking if anyone else was hurt when I was safe in bed, and didn't think any longer that I was going to die of my burns. Laura, I knew, wasn't, because she ran away, and never came near the flames at all, which I thought very cruel at the time; but it does seem queer that it never entered my head that poor Miss Power had been burnt too.

And people were so kind, and so afraid of making me unhappy, that they never said one

word about it, and I dare say I shouldn't have known it until I got up again, if I hadn't chanced one day to say to Nelly that I wished Miss Power would come and see me.

"But I suppose she's too angry with me for putting those things in her bed, and for setting my night-gown on fire," I added rather dolefully, feeling that certainly she had got reason to be both vexed and angry.

"She's not angry at all, she's only sorry for you," Nelly replied, looking very funny, and turning away her head so that I couldn't see her face.

"Then I suppose she's too busy ; she must think me a dreadful plague, Nelly. First, I wouldn't learn my lessons because I was lazy, and now I can't because I'm ill."

"Well, you can't help being ill, that she knows quite well," said Nelly, anxious to console me ; she was such a comforting person, you know.

"I can't help it now, but I could have helped it once," I replied; "but I wish she could spare time just to come up here for five minutes. I have something I should like to say to her, Nelly."

"What is it, Maggie? perhaps I can tell her for you."

"Then you think she wouldn't come?" I said, feeling rather disappointed, for I hadn't the least idea of the truth.

"Well, you see, I don't know," replied Nelly, looking so confused and turning so red, that I saw at once that something was the matter.

"Nelly, what is it?" I exclaimed, sitting straight up in bed, and looking very hard at my little friend; she generally told me every thought she had, so I couldn't think what could have happened.

"I'm afraid I mustn't tell you," Nelly said, looking so uncomfortable that I began to feel quite sure that something terrible must

have happened; "Mrs. Comfort said we mustn't."

"Then I know quite well," I replied; "she's gone away, and no wonder; she's sick and tired of our pranks, and I am sure if I'd been her I should have gone long ago."

"No, she hasn't gone; you're quite wrong, Maggie, I can tell you that."

"Then she's going, it's all the same thing, I knew she would;" and I lay back on my pillow and began to cry.

Now, you know, though I have told you that I'm very bad in every possible way, and I'm sure it's true, there's one thing I must say for myself, and that is that I am not a cry-baby. If I do cry, and I don't very often, it's because I really am very unhappy; and this time I'm sure I felt perfectly miserable. The very thing I'd always said I wished seemed to have happened, and it made me wretched.

But Nelly wouldn't let me cry. "You

really mustn't; Mrs. Comfort would be so angry," she said, "and she'd say it was all my fault. And Miss Power isn't going, that I know of, though of course if she doesn't get well she may be obliged to go home."

"Get well! then she's ill!" I exclaimed, greatly relieved to be rid of the idea that our naughtiness had driven her away. "But what's the matter with her?"

"Oh, how stupid I am!—how dreadfully stupid!" Nelly exclaimed; "but I never can keep a secret. Please don't think any more about it, Maggie; Miss Power is not so very, very ill—at least, I mean, I hope she won't die."

"Die!" I exclaimed, "I should hope not; but what's the matter with her? Come, Nelly, as you've told so much, you may as well tell the rest, and say what's the matter with her."

But Nelly wouldn't; no, nothing would induce her. Mrs. Comfort had said that no

one was to tell me, and she wasn't going to be disobedient if she could help it.

I couldn't help feeling dreadfully angry with her, and I am afraid I should have said something very naughty to her, if just at that moment Mrs. Comfort hadn't come into the room.

Nelly ran away at once, and the kind old lady sat down by my bed, and began asking me what was the matter, and what made my cheeks look so red.

How ashamed I felt, for I knew quite well that it was because I had got angry with Nelly that they were so hot and scarlet, and really Nelly was quite right to refuse to tell what Mrs. Comfort meant to keep secret.

"You haven't been quarrelling, I hope?" the old lady said, and very glad I felt that I could say no; it would have been so very naughty to quarrel with Nelly, who had been so kind to me all the while I had been ill, that I should have been quite ashamed to confess it, had it been true.

"Please, Mrs. Comfort," I said at last, "is Miss Power ill? I haven't seen her for ever so long, not since that night when I got burnt, I think."

"My dear, she isn't very well, or you should have seen her. I'm quite sure she has asked for you every day."

A dreadful thought came into my head as she spoke. I don't know how it was it had never occurred to me before, nor why it came then. I hardly liked to speak it, it seemed so frightful; but it came out at last.

"Mrs. Comfort, oh, do tell me, did her dress catch fire too, that dreadful night?"

The old lady hesitated; I know she didn't like to tell me; but I suppose she took pity on my misery, for she said very kindly, "Yes, my dear, it did, and her hand got burnt; but we hope she will soon be well again; she has had the same kind doctor as you have."

"And does he say he is quite, quite sure she will get well?" I inquired, for I felt as if

I would rather die than hear that there was any fear that Miss Power was likely to suffer seriously through her kindness to me.

"My dear, don't look so unhappy; we hope Miss Power will soon be quite well again, but we can never be quite sure of anything in this world, you know."

"But I want to be sure," I cried, piteously. "I can't bear to think of her dying through my fault, for it *was* all my fault that I got burnt, and it's no use to pretend that it wasn't."

"We all know quite well that it was your own fault," said the old lady, gravely, "and that's the worst part of the whole affair, to me. In fact, Maggie, that is the part that I cannot bear to think about, it grieves me so."

They were the first words of reproof I had heard since my accident, and I need not tell anybody how ashamed I felt. Though I'm not a cry-baby, I did cry with all my heart.

then, and Mrs. Comfort did not try to stop me. I was glad she didn't, for I couldn't have stopped to have pleased her or anyone else then, till I'd cried till all my tears seemed used up.

Then I sobbed out, "I know it's the worst part of it, Mrs. Comfort, but I did think that I had punished myself and nobody else; I hadn't the least idea that Miss Power was hurt."

"No," said Mrs. Comfort; "but though you never thought of her being burnt, and never intended to be guilty of such mischief as that, you will not deny, Maggie, that you did intend to hurt her, and that for months past you have been trying to vex and worry her."

I could not deny it, and didn't try to excuse myself. I knew I hadn't a word to say, and I was afraid to open my mouth for fear I should begin to cry again, for I was still weak and ill, and oh, so wretched!

I think Mrs. Comfort would have been

glad if I had said something, but I really didn't know what to say. It is easy enough to say one's sorry, but just then I was afraid Mrs. Comfort wouldn't believe me, and that would have made me still more miserable.

But when she got up to go away, looking at me in a sad, perplexed way, as if she couldn't understand how anyone could possibly be so naughty, I seized hold of her hand and tried to keep her.

"What do you want, Maggie?" she said, so gravely that she didn't look like the smiling old lady we had been used to say couldn't be angry, and I felt really quite afraid of her.

"I want to be quite different," I sobbed. "I want to leave off being so tiresome, and begin all over again."

She looked at me a moment, and then she stooped down and kissed me. "I hope you do," she said; "it's time there was a difference."

"But it's so hard," I said, still crying, "and I don't know how."

She shook her head sadly. "It's always hard to do work again that has been done badly first ; you have found that out in your lessons, I should think. And in your needlework, if you do a hem badly, isn't it much more trouble if you have to undo it and do it over again, than if you did it well the first time?"

"Yes, indeed it is," I answered.

"But our lives can't be lived over again," she said, mournfully ; "we can't undo the past, however hard we may try : you may wish it, Maggie, but you can never do it."

I hadn't thought of that, and the idea made me very sad ; it puzzled me too, for I had been thinking that as I was sorry for it, people would forget my naughtiness, and so my sorrow would make things right.

"And is it no use to be sorry?" I asked, at last, for Mrs. Comfort's words made me feel in despair.

"We shall see," Mrs. Comfort replied; "some little girls are ready to say they are sorry as soon as ever their faults get them into trouble; but as soon as the trouble is over and past they forget all about it, and go and commit the same faults again. That kind of sorrow isn't of much use, Maggie."

"But I couldn't be like that, Mrs. Comfort," I said, very earnestly, "because I see now quite well how silly it is for me to think I can settle things for myself; I can't be proud, and conceited, and obstinate again, because I've found out how naughty it is."

"And shall you never forget?"

"I should think not. I've thought about it so much, and made such good plans, that I don't think I ever can forget."

"Then you'll be very different from most people, Maggie," said the old lady. "No, my child, you may believe me, you'll forget many times, and I will tell you why: you've got, as you know quite well, a

wicked heart, full of wrong desires, and these wrong desires you have been indulging till you have acquired a great many bad habits, and these bad habits won't be conquered in a day, no, not in a month, nor in a year."

"Then what hard work it will be to be good."

"It is the hardest work in the world, Maggie."

"And I don't quite know how to begin; what shall I do, Mrs. Comfort?"

"Do you really want to know, Maggie?"

"Oh yes, indeed I do. I thought it Miss Power could come and see me I would tell her how sorry I am, and would promise her to be good when I begin lessons again. And then I would tell the girls that I mean to be quite different, and would beg them to try and be good too; is that a good plan, Mrs. Comfort?"

"Very good, Maggie; but you have forgotten the first thing of all."

“What do you mean, Mrs. Comfort? Oh, I ought to ask you to forgive me as well as Miss Power; I meant to do that too, and I quite forgot that I hadn’t.”

“That was not what I meant at all, Maggie; there is something much more important still, and your plan will not succeed if you forget that.”

I could not understand her, and at last the old lady went on to explain what she meant.

“You have no father or mother, Maggie, or else I should like you to tell them what you have been telling me; but though you have no earthly father to care for you, you have a Father in heaven who never ceases to watch you, though you have wandered very far from the paths that He would like you to walk in. Have you nothing to tell to Him, and nothing to ask Him for?”

The tears would come back into my eyes when she said this, and I wished I could answer her properly, but I wanted to say

something, and so I said the first thing that came into my head : " Mrs. Comfort, would He listen to me, do you think ? "

" Yes, Maggie, I do think He would."

" And would He be angry if I told Him all I've been doing that is naughty, and asked Him to teach me how to be good ? "

" No, Maggie, that is what He bids us to do. To come to Him when we are so wicked that we hate ourselves, and tell Him all about it."

" And will He really help me to learn my lessons well, and will He stop my tongue when it is going to say naughty things about having our own way ; and oh, Mrs. Comfort, will He take away that thing inside me that is always making me feel obstinate, and proud, and conceited ? It would be so nice if He would."

" Will He help you to conquer your self-will, you mean ? No doubt He will, if you ask Him ; but I am going away now,

Maggie, and though you can't go and speak to Miss Power just yet, you can do what we have been talking about, and there is no reason why you should not do it at once."

She went away, and I did try to do as she advised me; but I am very much afraid that I was not half as sorry as I ought to have been, for, as she said, I could never live my life over again, and so I am afraid that my first year at school was wasted, or worse than wasted.

But I have been talking so much about myself that I am sure you must think that all my sorrow for Miss Power was put on or pretended. I can assure you it was not. I was quite miserable about her, because I could not get anyone to answer my questions properly. Mrs. Comfort always said she hoped she would soon be well, and it was not till I was able to go and see her myself that I found out how dreadfully ill she had been. It was her hand that had got burnt, and I very

soon discovered that at first the doctor had thought he should have to cut it off.

Only think of that—to have your hand cut off, how dreadful ! But Nelly says Miss Power only turned a little pale when he talked about it, and did not cry one bit. She really is the very bravest person I ever knew.

But Nelly, who was always running in and out of her room—for Nelly thought herself a capital nurse—brought me at last the joyful tidings that the doctor said he had given up that idea, and thought now that there was no fear of her poor hand not getting well in time. It was an immense relief, for only think, if it had been cut off I should never have been able to look at her without saying to myself, “That is all my fault,” and so I must have been miserable to the end of my days.

I used to pray God every day to make her well, that I might not have that dreadful trouble ; and I think He did hear my prayer, though I am sure I didn't deserve it.



Nelly thought herself a capital nurse.

CHAPTER XIII.

WELL AGAIN.

BUT before Miss Power got quite well something happened to me which I didn't like at all ; indeed it seemed quite grown-up people call a trial.

This was a short visit home ; for when she heard what had happened, Aunt Sophia put on her bonnet and shawl in a great hurry and got into the train and came to see me.

Now, as I am determined to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in this book, I must confess that I wasn't at all glad to see Aunt Sophia ; perhaps it would be truer still to say I was very sorry. For, you see, I wasn't very fond of her, and as I knew quite well that she would scold me

more than pity me for my catastrophe, I did wish she wouldn't come till I was quite well again. I don't much mind being scolded by some people; for instance, when Mrs. Comfort told me it was all my fault I got burnt, she didn't say it in a way that made me angry, only very, very sorry; but if Aunt Sophia said the same thing, I knew quite well her way of saying it would make me feel furious, and I should want to answer her rudely, which would be dreadful after all my good resolutions.

And it all turned out just as I had expected. She came, and when I tried to look sorry my face would be disagreeable and do exactly what I didn't mean it to, and so Aunt said I was sulky; that made me want to cry, but I wouldn't let myself shed one tear, and I held my tongue quite tight between my front teeth that it mightn't go and say anything impertinent, but it was very hard, and I very nearly bit the end of it off.

I can't tell you how glad I was when Aunt Sophia fastened her bonnet again and went away; though certainly the last words she said made me very miserable, still I was glad when she was gone. The words she said were: "Then, Mrs. Comfort, when she is well enough, you will allow my niece to come home for a few days, though she certainly does not deserve it; I think it as well her uncle should have some talk with her, and the change may do her good."

I was to go home only because I was ill, and that Uncle Fred might give me a lecture; oh, how I hoped it wouldn't be a long one! for I was dreadfully afraid of Uncle Fred, I suppose because I knew so little about him.

But what I dreaded worse than Uncle Fred or his lecture was Aunt Sophia, and the way that she and Davies would talk; in fact I hardly wanted to get well, I was so unhappy at the thought of going home and having to listen to all they would say.

"I know I shall be naughty," I said to Nelly, when I had told her about what Aunt had said ; "she makes me cross and ill-tempered even when I mean to be good."

Nelly looked grave, but she didn't say anything, and I continued : "It is altogether so tiresome, for, you see, I was quite longing to begin to live differently, and to show Mrs. Comfort how well I mean to keep my resolutions, and now it is all put off again."

"But you can begin keeping them at home," my little friend said, for I had told her all about my three resolutions, and she had decided that they were very good indeed, and that she would make the same.

"No, I can't," I replied ; "I can't be good at home ; I never can."

"But perhaps you didn't try before," said Nelly, "and now of course you will."

"It's of no use," I answered despondently ;
"Aunt puts me out and Davies puts me out,

and if Uncle begins scolding like Aunt, he will be just as bad."

"But if they were all quite kind and you had no troubles, it would be quite easy to be good; you wouldn't need to try at all."

"I don't believe it's ever easy to be good," I replied; but this remark of Nelly's made me resolve that I would at least try, and so I did, and though I might certainly have been better, I don't think my visit at home was quite such a failure as I had feared it would be. For though I know from her face that Davies had meant to be very severe, when she saw the scars that my burns had left she couldn't help pitying me, and when I found that out I could hold my tongue, when she said, as she did at least once a day, "I am sure it ought to teach you a lesson, Miss."

And then my lecture from Uncle Fred, which I had dreaded so much because I couldn't guess in the least what it would be like, was not half so bad as I had expected.

The worst of it was that Uncle was now so weak and ill that I felt quite miserable to think that he should have to take the trouble to scold me, it must have been such a bore to him when his breath was so bad that he couldn't help coughing every two minutes.

I don't like to write down what he said to me, though I could, for I remember every word, but I am afraid I should spoil it, for it was even nicer than what Mrs. Comfort said, and it wasn't a bit like a scolding at all ;—at least, if people always scolded in that way I shouldn't mind if they did it every day, though I don't mean to say that it didn't make me sorry and unhappy, or that I didn't cry, because I know I did.

And as for Aunt Sophia, she didn't say much, only watched me in her very odd way, and when she saw that I walked about very quietly, and didn't play with the cat quite as much as I used to do—for the cat had grown old and stupid—I think she thought my

accident had done me some good after all, and so she wasn't so angry as she was at first when she saw that all my hair was burnt off, and that I should have to wear a wig.

That was a very funny part of my accident, I mean my having to wear a wig, and though Davies seemed very shocked about it, I must say I thought it was rather good fun, for one of my greatest troubles had always been that I had to stand still while my hair was done, and that generally happened to be when I wanted to run about. But now, my hair being all gone, it wasn't half so much trouble to dress, and if Davies pulled my wig very hard when she combed it out, you see, I knew nothing about it, so that it did not signify to me.

It is true I didn't much like it at first, when the girls laughed about it, and called me an old woman because I wore a wig; but I soon found out that the best thing to

do was to laugh too, and then I did not mind.

It seemed very strange that though I had disliked the idea of going home after my illness so much, yet when I had been at home about ten days, and Aunt began to talk of my going back to school, I did not feel half so anxious about it as I had thought I should.

Why this was I can hardly tell, perhaps because I had been much happier at home than ever before; I had not got into half so many scrapes as usual; Aunt didn't have to tell me about washing my hands and sitting straight half as often as she did before I went to school, and Davies said I kept my room in much better order than I did in the last holidays, so that I think they both liked me better, and I do believe that my three resolutions had something to do with this.

But, besides this, when I went back to school, I had a thought in my head that

made me very unhappy, and this was about Uncle Fred; perhaps it was fancy, but I couldn't help thinking I should never see him again; I thought he was going to die, and though my reason for thinking so may sound very odd to some people, I do believe there was some sense in it; for part of his talk with me was about heaven; he told me that he thought that if ever I went to heaven, as he hoped I should, I should not like to think of my naughty childhood, and that when I came to die it would make me very sad to think that the time when I might have been so happy, the time when everybody was anxious to help me to be good and useful, had been wasted entirely, and it seemed to me as I listened to him that he must have got very near that time himself, or he would not have known so well how people feel when they are going to die. And now that I cared more about him than I had ever thought I should, it made me very sad to

think that he was going right away from me. I should have liked to have lived with him when my school-time is over, to have read to him, and made him happy and comfortable; but that I never shall now, and I wish that he had not gone away from me before he had ever had the least bit of pleasure in his little niece Maggie.

But I am going on too fast; I must not forget to tell about my going back to school, for though it wasn't all pleasant, I was very glad to be there again, and as I settled down into my old place, I tried to remember my old resolutions, and, queer though it seemed, began my lessons with all my might.

The girls were very kind, and seemed very glad to see me, why, I can't imagine, for I think they must have found out what a horrid girl I was by this time, for it was quite plain that they had all changed their minds about Miss Power, and if they liked her they couldn't help disliking me.

When I heard about this change—for Nelly had written to me while I was away, and had told me that they were all trying to do their lessons quite well, so as to give Miss Power as little trouble as possible—I felt rather afraid of going back to school.

It seemed so plain that if I had not been there, and if I had not put it into their heads, they never would have rebelled against our governess, that I felt quite sure they must see how mischievous I had been, and hate me accordingly.

So, as you may imagine, I felt rather shy when I found myself in the midst of them all again, and I wanted terribly to know all they had said about me while I was away. "Hadn't they wished with all their hearts that I would not come back again?" I asked Nelly on the very first opportunity when we were alone together.

She hesitated for a minute, and I felt quite sure that I had guessed the truth.

"I don't wonder at it, I am sure," I said ;
"you needn't mind telling me, Nelly."

"But they didn't; at least, only two or three of them said anything of the kind, and they don't think it now," Nelly replied ; "so you needn't be vexed, Maggie."

"I'm not vexed; I can't expect anyone to like me, for it wouldn't have been at all strange if I had set the whole room on fire, and then perhaps two or three of them would have died; of course they know that perfectly well."

"I don't believe they ever thought of such a thing," Nelly replied, very warmly ;
"they've been sorry for you, and I've often heard them pity you, and say what dreadful pain you must have suffered when the flames were all round you, burning up your night-gown and setting your hair on fire."

I shuddered at the remembrance, not of the pain, but of the horror of that moment when I first saw what had happened; and

Nelly noticed my look, and exclaimed: "But we mustn't talk of that; it will make you ill again, I know."

"I suspect," I said, "that Miss Power's hand gave her more pain than all my burns put together; the doctor told Aunt Sophia that he was much more uneasy about her than about me, so you see she must have been the worst."

"She looked dreadfully bad when she first came downstairs," Nelly replied; "but she began giving us our lessons again directly. Mrs. Comfort had been teaching us in the meantime; it used to seem so funny."

"I should think so; I can never make out how she could teach," I replied. "But do tell me, Nelly, when the girls first saw Miss Power in the schoolroom again, what did they do?"

"They got all their books and things in a great hurry, and tried to do their lessons without giving her the least trouble. Our

first geography-lesson with her was great fun, Maggie, for little Georgie was so distressed with the idea that she would have to hurt her hand by holding the pointer, that she teased to be allowed to stand on a stool, and find the places for us. She was so slow and stupid, and yet she was so anxious to do it well, that Miss Power let her do it several times, and Georgie always imagined that she was giving the lesson, and was as pleased as possible."

"The little goose! It wouldn't really have hurt Miss Power, because she could have held the stick in her other hand."

"Yes, but Georgie couldn't see that; she is a kind little thing, you know. It was she, Maggie, who couldn't quite get over the idea that you had been the cause of poor Miss Power's sufferings, and so wished you were not coming back."

"Was it? — but she received me very nicely; she gave me one of her very warmest



Georgie always imagined that she was giving the lesson.



hugs; I had no idea that she didn't like me."

"No, I daresay not; but that is Miss Power's doing. She was very vexed with Georgie for the way she talked, and threatened one day to send her to bed if she heard her say such things again."

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, that she hated you; she said it a great many times over, till all the little ones began to say so too; they copy everything, you know, and that was why Miss Power was so vexed with Georgie."

"But Georgie didn't get sent to bed, did she?"

"No, because she was frightened when she saw that Miss Power was really vexed. I think she had done it in the first place on purpose to please her; she couldn't understand that Miss Power was not as angry with you as *she* was."

"She doesn't *seem* in the least angry: I

can't understand it," I replied; "she was kinder than she ever used to be when I came in, though I felt so shy that I hardly liked to look at her."

"I think we made a mistake when we thought she was cross," said Kate Clowes, who joined us at this moment; "she always looks grave, but that doesn't prove she's cross, you know."

"No, perhaps she's had a great deal of trouble," I suggested. "I heard Aunt Sophia say that governesses had often to bear plenty of sorrow; and you know she always wears a black frock."

"Perhaps her papa died a little while ago, and if so she'd never get any money given her when she comes back to school," suggested Nelly, who always seemed to think that it was her papa's chief business to keep her well supplied with money.

"But perhaps her face may not be made to smile," said Kate; "I have a little sister

who never smiles at all, not even if you tickle her."

"It's a very awkward thing," I remarked; "because how are you to know whether a person is pleased or vexed if she does not smile to show you?"

"Well, with Miss Power, I don't think it's very hard to find out, because we know quite well that if we learn our lessons perfectly, do what she tells us, and, in short, try to be good, she's sure to be pleased," said Kate positively.

"Yes, but there are little things," Nelly suggested. "Now, yesterday, she found fault with my writing, said it was too slanting, and that it was because I didn't hold my pen properly; so I tried after that to keep it more upright; but I wasn't sure whether I was doing what she meant, and if she'd only smiled the next time she looked at me, I should have known."

It certainly seemed to me that there was

something in Nelly's idea; but one can't make people exactly what you want them, and if this was the only thing we had against Miss Power, it was quite evident we had been making a great fuss about nothing.

But you may be wondering whether, like the children one reads about sometimes who have been very naughty and then suddenly become very good indeed, I too found it quite easy to keep my resolutions, and never more get into any trouble.

I wish I could say that such was the case; but that would be a dreadful story, and so you mustn't think anything of the kind.

Sometimes I got on pretty well; my resolution about learning my lessons wasn't so very difficult to keep, [because I am not very stupid, I can generally learn my lessons pretty easily if I try; but the other two were a dreadful plague. It used sometimes to seem to me as if I'd got two things inside me that were always wrangling, like the dolls in a

Punch-and-Judy show, and one of these two feelings would want to do something dreadfully bad, and the other would say "No, you mustn't, it's wrong," and so they used to fight, and sometimes one got the best of it, and sometimes the other.

It always made me very uncomfortable when they went on in this way ; but I suppose it's only what I must expect, and what Mrs. Comfort meant when she said I should find it very hard to be good.

I think it must be very nice not to have any self-will, since it's that tiresome thing that gives so much trouble. Once it got me into a horrid scrape, after I came back to school again, and I will tell all about it to show that I hadn't got suddenly good, as you may have fancied. It was just before lessons were over one evening towards the end of the term. I had been good all day, and never thought of doing anything wrong till one minute before it happened—in fact, I don't believe I thought

about it one minute at all; I didn't know what I was doing till it was done and I couldn't undo it.

I was putting away my books in a great hurry, thinking I should have a nice run with Nelly in the garden before tea, when Miss Power said suddenly, "Maggie, have you learnt your poetry for to-morrow morning? It seems to me that you have forgotten all about it."

Now, as it happened, I hadn't forgotten, but I had a plan of my own about this poetry which Miss Power did not approve of, though I thought it delightful, so I said, "No, Miss Power, I haven't learnt it, but I will get up earlier and do it before breakfast to-morrow."

"And then it will be imperfectly learnt, as it was last time. No, Maggie, you must learn it now."

Oh, that word *must*; why does it always make me feel as if I would rather die than give in. I felt so then, and I looked up in

her face, and tried hard to speak as quietly as she, as I answered—

“I can learn it quite well to-morrow morning.”

“I wish you to learn it now,” was all Miss Power’s answer; but there was a look in her eyes that I understood, and did not like. It seemed to say, “If we fight, you know who will conquer.”

Yes, I knew it perfectly well, and yet, though I fetched the book and sat with it in front of me, it was a whole hour before I could make up my mind to learn it; the others went in to tea, and I had mine sent to me in the schoolroom, and still I sat there, feeling miserable, but unable to conquer myself so far as to do what I was told.

The others went to spend the evening, as we always did, in the drawing-room with Mrs. Comfort; only Miss Power and I were alone in the schoolroom; but when we were quite alone, and there was no fear of any of

the little ones coming back to seek missing books or work, she spoke to me, without looking at me or even raising her eyes from her work, just one little sentence : "What about your resolution, Maggie?"

I think I was giving in before this ; but that little sentence finished me. I didn't say one word, but I took up my book and set to work with all my might to learn my poetry ; it did not take me many minutes when I tried, as I could try if I liked, and so in a very short time I was saying it with a very flushed face, and a voice that would not keep steady, in spite of all my efforts.

Miss Power listened quite patiently to the end, and then when I murmured something about being sorry, which was quite true by this time, she answered, in a tone that sounded quite as sorrowful as mine, " And so am I, Maggie; is it the old story over again ? "

" Oh no ! oh no ! " I said, but she inter-

rupted me with, "Don't be so sure; you think so now, but I am afraid for you, Maggie, perhaps more than you are for yourself. By to-morrow morning you will have forgotten all about your broken resolution, or I am very much mistaken."

"I really don't think I shall," I persisted, "because I am really sorry."

"Perhaps so, I hope you are; but, Maggie, what do you think your schoolfellows thought of you to-night. They saw your naughtiness, but they know nothing about your sorrow. Now listen to what I wish you to do. You are going to bed now; I do not mean you to go and enjoy yourself with the others in the drawing-room; but you may go there first and wish Mrs. Comfort good-night, and tell her why you are going to bed so early."

It seemed a horrible task, for I knew how all the girls would stare at me; but I knew that I must do it, so I went and got through it as fast as ever I could.

My cheeks, I know, didn't get cool till I had laid them for some time on the cold pillow, and my head ached dreadfully, as it always does when I've been fighting to get my own way.

I wonder whether Miss Power knew how I hated the task she had given me to do ; I wonder whether she ever had to do such a thing when she was a child ; if so, how glad she must have been that her cheeks didn't turn scarlet like mine did. And why do girls always stare so if one has to do a disagreeable thing of that kind ; they need not have looked at me, and I am sure they ought not to have listened to what Mrs. Comfort said to me when she heard my story, which, by the by, I didn't tell exactly as Miss Power meant me to do.

For the old lady asked me so many questions, and looked so hard at me over the top of her spectacles, that I felt as if the room was going round, and I really didn't know in

the least what I was saying. Like Miss Power, she seemed to think I was going back to my old ways again; it is a dreadful thing to have got a bad character; but she wanted to hear all about it, and when I told her that Miss Power had told me to go to bed, she said, "Yes, very right; I am quite disappointed in you, Maggie, and if I hear any more of this obstinacy and self-will, I shall certainly have to write and complain to your aunt; you cannot be allowed to go on in this way."

It seemed very hard that she didn't seem to believe that I had quite made up my mind never to do such a thing again as long as I lived; but I suppose it really isn't at all strange, because if a child breaks one promise, it is quite as likely as not that she will forget all about another.

Altogether I was very miserable that night, and it was a very long time before I went to sleep; I wasn't quite tired of my resolutions

yet, but I was afraid they would never be kept as they ought to be. And what Mrs. Comfort had said about complaining to my aunt made me still more unhappy. To think of Uncle, who had spoken to me so kindly, being worried by another bad account of me, just perhaps as he was dying, and wouldn't want to have to think at all about his naughty niece! I must prevent such a terrible thing as this from happening; I would be good, if it were only to keep Uncle from being tormented by bad news of me on his death-bed.

For I was quite sure he was dying nobody had told me so, but I never had the least doubt of it, and when one day a letter came for me from Aunt Sophia, with a black edge round it, I knew quite well what had happened before I read a word.

I was very sorry to hear the news, but I was very glad indeed that as yet Mr. Comfort had not written that dreadful letter to

my aunt, which would, I felt sure, have given my uncle great sorrow—though why he should care for such a mischievous troublesome child as I am, I can't imagine.

Sometimes I have thought that when Uncle looked forward to heaven, he remembered that he should meet my papa and mamma there, and then it would make him sad to think of the bad account he would have to give of me; but I don't know whether that was the real reason why he looked so sorry when he talked about my naughty ways, because I know people can't be unhappy in heaven, and so I hope they know nothing of the bad things their children do in the world.

However that may be, when I heard about Uncle's death, I made up my mind that I would try with all my might to think more about God, my Father in heaven, and try and live so as to please Him. If, as Uncle said, God will forget all my past naughtiness

and wash my soul in Jesus' blood, who died for the love of such bad children as I am, I am sure I ought to try and please Him. Uncle said He knew quite well what a trouble my temper is to me, and that if I only asked Him, He would help me to keep it in order; only I do forget so.

CHAPTER XIV.

QUELLED.

ABOUT a week after I received that letter from my aunt telling me about my uncle's death, I had a visit from Davies—who came looking very solemn and unhappy—to bring me some black things to wear, because Uncle was dead.

Some of the girls wondered that I was not very unhappy about having to wear such ugly things, when I had such a pretty blue frock, that I generally wore on Sundays, and such a nice long blue feather in my best hat.

But I didn't mind it at all—in fact I think I was rather pleased, for though I couldn't possibly think my new frock pretty, I liked

to wear it, as Davies said, in memory of my uncle.

Davies cried a great deal when she talked about him, and I wished very much that I was like her, and could cry just when I wanted to, and when it was right and proper. But I couldn't, and I am afraid Davies must have gone home and told Aunt Sophia that I was a most unfeeling child, which wasn't true, for I was always feeling something, and making myself miserable about some of my bad feelings.

And I really was sorry about Uncle; and when I thought about going home and finding him not there, I almost wished I might never go home any more.

If Davies hadn't cried so much herself, I think I should have felt much worse than I did, but she always looked so funny when she cried, and said such queer things, that I could hardly help laughing, though I tried very hard indeed.

One thing she said I remember quite well now, because it seemed such a very odd thing to say, and I couldn't help thinking she must have made a mistake.

“Ah, Miss Maggie, he was a good uncle to you, though you mayn't know it or care about him; I always say children are the most ungrateful things in the world; but grateful or ungrateful, he's left you a lot of money, more than ever you'll know what to do with.”

To think of my poor uncle, who was so ill and weak the last time I saw him that he could scarcely speak or move, troubling himself to get a lot of money out of his pockets for me who didn't really want it, and certainly didn't deserve a penny of it at all, seemed so very unlikely that I felt quite sure Davies had invented the story to please me, which was very absurd, and was treating me just like a baby; but I didn't say so, and very soon afterwards Davies went away.

I was standing looking at my black hat as it lay on the bed where she had left it, and wondering to myself why people wore black things when other people were dead, and who first invented the plan, when Nelly came into the room with a face brimming over with curiosity and wonder, and, coming quite close to me, whispered, as if she was afraid that the walls might have ears, as the people say, "Do you know, Maggie, I believe something wonderful has happened, something very wonderful indeed."

"Where?—what do you mean?" I asked, for Nelly looked so very strange that I hadn't the very faintest idea what kind of wonder she meant, nor where it could have happened.

"Why, do you know that we've found out that your maid—I mean your aunt's maid—brought a letter from your aunt to Mrs. Comfort, and she sent for Miss Power, and I suppose told her all about it; and I am

sure it must have been something very great and wonderful, for when she came back to the schoolroom she had quite a pink spot on each cheek; they are gone again now, though, so you won't see them."

"What could there have been in Aunt's letter that Mrs. Comfort should care to tell Miss Power at once?" I said. "I wonder whether I am going to be taken away from school? Oh, I do hope not!"

"I don't think it would be that, because, though I daresay Miss Power would be very sorry if you went away, still I don't think she would look quite like that."

"I don't believe she'd be a bit sorry; why should she be? But if it's not that, what can it be?"

"I can't possibly guess: I wish we knew."

"I suppose it's no business of ours, or Mrs. Comfort would have come into the school-room and told her, so that everybody might

hear," I said, but I knew I felt every bit as curious as Nelly.

But it was a long time before we found out anything more about it; in fact, though we knew quite well that something was going to happen, because there was a sort of bustle, and a great deal of talking between Mrs. Comfort, Miss Power, and Miss Phillips, what it all meant we couldn't anyhow make out. I daresay that if we had been good children we should not have troubled our heads about the matter, but then, though we were better than we used to be, we were very far from quite good yet.

For I believe it takes much longer to get really good than most people pretend, and I know now that just when I begin to think I'm getting a great deal better, I get into some scrape and have to begin all over again. It's very discouraging, but I suppose I might get conceited again if I found I could cure myself of my faults without any difficulty.

But to go back to Miss Power and the mystery. All sorts of funny things happened, which kept up our curiosity, so that it was impossible for us to forget about the letter that Davies had brought from my aunt to Mrs. Comfort. That it could not have anything to do with me was quite plain now, for nobody said one word to me about it, as I am sure they would have done if I had been going to leave, or if anything was going to happen to me.

No, it was plainly nothing to do with me; but why Aunt should write to Mrs. Comfort about Miss Power nobody could imagine. And then we began to be afraid that she—I mean Miss Power—was going away; why, we couldn't imagine, because if she could bear us when we were so naughty, surely she might have tried to tolerate us when we were trying to be better.

And yet what else could it all mean? For her mamma came to see her, and her brothers

and sisters, and though nobody said anything, we felt quite sure that they did nothing but tell her that we were such troublesome children that we should be certain to make her ill if she stayed any longer.

How I did wish that she would not always look so pale and ill, for though Nelly declared she had seen her with two bright pink spots on her cheeks, I can say for certain that there had never been one speck of colour on them when I saw her.

Yes, we felt quite certain that she was going away, and much as we had wished it a little while ago, it was now the thing we dreaded above all others.

But we knew nothing for certain till the evening before the holidays began ; the long talks between Mrs. Comfort and Miss Power still went on, but we had ceased to wonder at them, because we had quite made up our minds about it, and didn't in the least expect to find Miss Power there when we came back.

Well, that last evening came, and all the mystery was at length explained. We went into the drawing-room, as we always did in the evening when our lessons were done, and found Mrs. Comfort there alone ; neither Miss Power nor Miss Phillips were in the room at all ; but that was nothing very strange, for as the holidays were going to begin the next day, of course they had their packing to do.

There was nothing at all said till it was time to go to bed. We played, or read, or worked, as we generally did, and the time went very fast ; but towards the end of the evening, I noticed that Mrs. Comfort often sat quite still looking at us as if she was thinking, and at last she laid down her work, and said, " I want to speak to you all before you go to bed, for I have something to tell you which will perhaps astonish you very much, but I would rather you heard it from me than from anyone else."

We all looked at each other and wondered what was coming, but nobody ventured to speak, and after a few minutes the old lady went on: "The holidays will begin to-morrow, and we shall have to say good-bye to each other; most of you, if not all, will, I hope, come back, but you will not find me here—I am going away too. I am not going to spend my holidays here as I generally do, but I intend to leave this house not to return; so, you see, you will not meet me again."

She stopped, and at first we were too much astonished to say anything—at least I was, and most of the others, but Kate, who was always the most ready to speak, found out the proper thing to say, and assured Mrs. Comfort that we were sorry indeed to hear the news she had told; then we remembered that we ought to say so too, and we joined in with all our might.

She looked rather pleased; I think she was

glad to find that the thought of not finding her there as usual, when we came back, made us sorry; but she went on speaking very quickly—

“You will not find the change very great, however, because it is a long time since I taught you anything at all, and now Miss Power will take my place, and live here instead of me.”

Then that was the mystery; the secret was out, and I think Mrs. Comfort must have been rather astonished at the burst of exclamations we uttered when she revealed the cause of all the curious circumstances that had so excited our suspicions. It was such a relief to find that she was not sick and tired of us, and did not mean to go away, that we could scarcely restrain our delight.

The kind old lady looked rather astonished, but very much pleased too, and she said so, adding: “I am glad you have found out how lucky you are to have such a teacher as Miss

Power ; it shows that you are wiser than you were a short time ago, when, you know, you were most anxious to weary out her patience and induce her to leave."

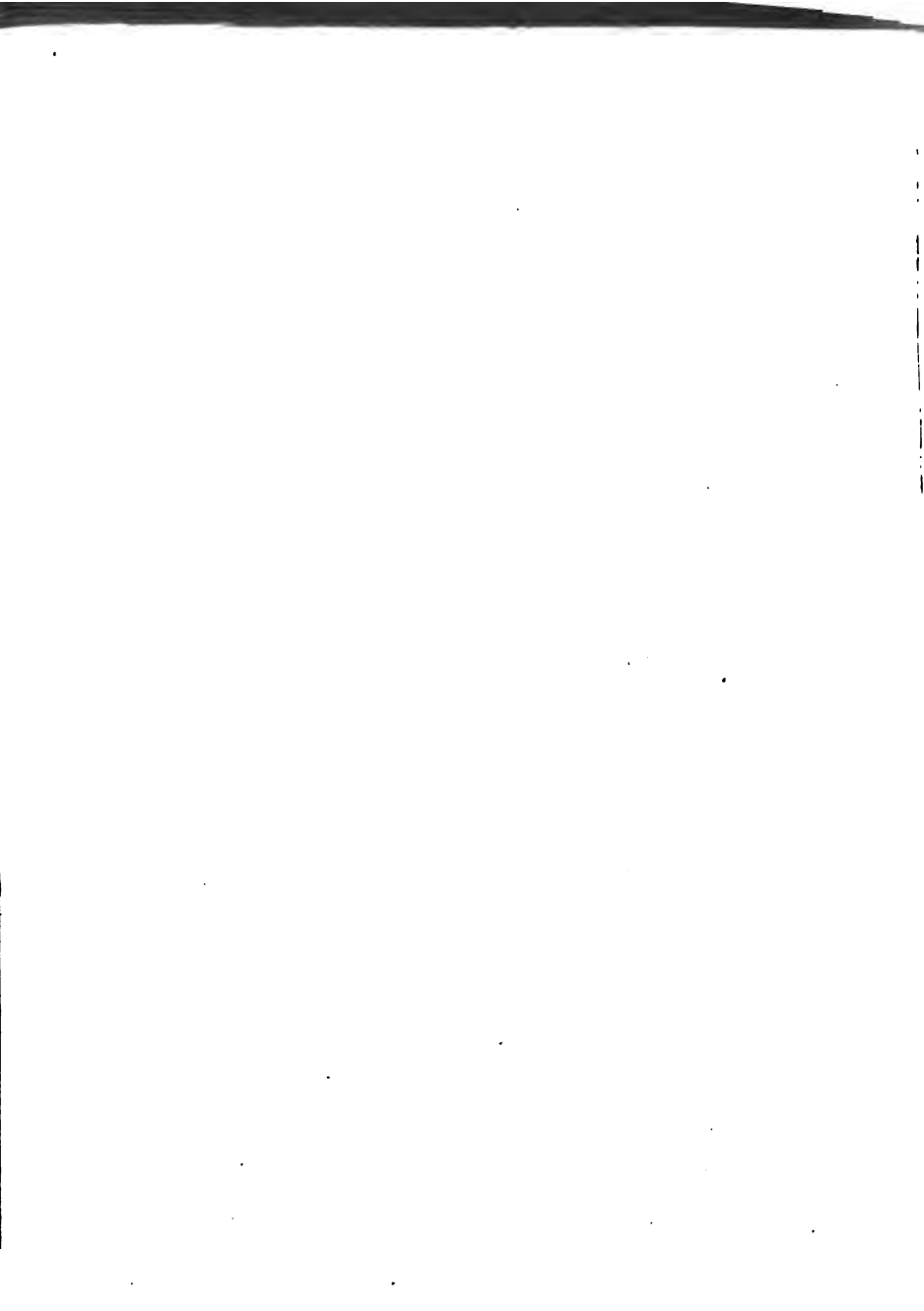
We could not help blushing to be reminded of the time when we were so very, very silly ; for we had almost forgotten the speeches we used to make then, and for my part I had hoped that other people had forgotten them too.

Mrs. Comfort did not say much more, but when we wished her good-night she told us that we might, if we liked, tell Miss Power that she had let out her secret ; so, greatly delighted, we scampered off to the school-room to find our governess, and tell her how glad we were that she was not going away.

She looked a little surprised at our boisterous exclamations, and smiled quite like other people when we told her how frightened we had been when we thought that she was



Her eyes seemed larger than ever, but we didn't hate them now.



going away, and that we should have a new governess.

She looked very hard at us, as if to see whether we were speaking the truth, and her eyes seemed larger than ever; but I did not hate them now.

I almost expected she would say, "I thought that was just what you wanted;" but she didn't, and I liked her all the better because she didn't.

It is so disagreeable to have one's silly remarks brought up again, just when one has found out how silly they are, and begun to wish that one had never said them; and I thought Miss Power was very kind to do nothing of the sort.

And now it has come into my head suddenly that I ought to have told you how it happened that Miss Power took the school; it is a very funny thing, and I don't quite understand how it happened, but I know that my uncle had something to do with it,

though he was dead now. He had left Miss Power a thing called a legacy—whatever that may be—to show her how grateful he was to her for saving my life; and this legacy, as Davies told me afterwards, helped her to buy the school. How people can buy schools of little girls, I can't imagine, for I thought people had left off buying and selling children long ago, and yet that was the word Davies used, I am quite sure. Perhaps she meant the house and furniture; yes, that must have been it, and how stupid it was of me not to think of this before.

But whatever it was, I was very glad to think that Miss Power had got something for saving me besides her poor burnt hand; and I am very glad, too, that Uncle thought me worth saving, though I am not sure that he would not have changed his mind if he had known as much about me as some people do. Still, I like to think that he loved *me*, his little orphan niece, for it's very nice to

be loved, and I am sure it helps one very much to be good, if one only knows that one is loved. I do believe I never really tried to be good, until Uncle Fred told me that Jesus Christ loved me—naughty little girl though I was.

Shall I ever forget that again, I wonder? Shall I go back to those wretched days that this story is all about? It seems impossible now. I will, yes, I will try to keep my three resolutions, and I'll make a fourth one now, and try and keep that too, and my fourth is, that I will ask God every day to help me.

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